

MOLL MEREDYTH MADCAP

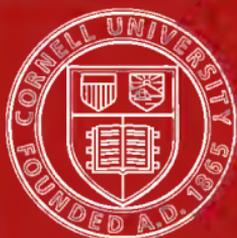


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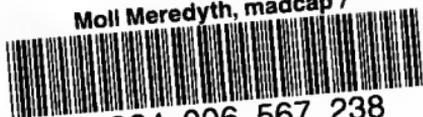
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MOLL MEREDYTH, MADCAP

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Moll Meredith, madcap /



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'Yes, rather, only you've got to take off your shoes and stockings,'
said Moll.

MOLL MEREDYTH

MADCAP

BY

MAY BALDWIN

Author of 'A City Schoolgirl,' 'Corah's School Chums,' 'A Schoolgirl of Moscow,'
'Teddy and Lily's Adventures,' 'Holly House,' &c.

WITH SIX COLOURED ILLUSTRATIONS

by

W. H. C. Groome

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AND THE
PLANTERS OF JOHORE

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Moll Meredyth, Madcap.

CHAPTER I.

THE PLANTER'S BUNGALOW.

THE punkah was swaying lazily to and fro in the planter's office, and as it passed it regularly lifted a few hairs from the heated planter's brow, and as regularly let them gently fall, cool and damp, on his forehead.

'You don't go in for the luxury of an electric fan, Meredyth?' observed his visitor, a man of calmer temperament, who leant back in a rattan chair, quietly smoking a cigarette and observing his host with keen eyes.

'Not I; we have no electric plant on the estate, to begin with, and I wouldn't have a fan in here if we had; they are too violent—chill me to the bone, which is dangerous in the state of heat I get into. I rather wonder at your advising it, doctor,' he wound up suddenly.

'Allow me to remark that I have not advised it. On the contrary, I agree with you that for a man of your disposition'—

'Disposition! Who said anything about disposition? I am talking about the heat I get into walking about the estate rowing these miserable coolies,' interrupted Mr Meredyth.

'Exactly. If you were of an easy-going disposition you would not get into a heat over the laziness or misdoings of these rascally Chinamen,' remarked the doctor, watching the planter mop his brow.

'Disposition be hanged! You'd be as hot as I am, or any one else who has walked some miles over a rubber estate in this tropical sun; and as for not getting angry and rowing these beggars, I shouldn't get much rubber if I didn't. You can't manage them by moral suasion as you can your patients,' retorted the planter.

Dr Hewlett threw back his head and laughed quietly as he blew the cigarette smoke up into the air. 'Good news from the youngsters at home?' he inquired.

'Yes, fairly—that's to say, they seem to find Mollie rather a handful at that school of hers. She wants her mother to keep her in order, that's the truth of it; nobody else can. But she won't leave me,' replied Mr Meredyth, looking worried.

The doctor had broached this subject of conversation as a pleasant one, a change from the monotonous topic of rubber and the trials

of rubber planters; but it also appeared to be a vexed topic too, as indeed it always is in the tropics, where the parting of parents and children is a painful necessity, and the wife has to choose between husband and children.

In this case the mother had chosen to stay in the Straits Settlements—or, to be accurate, Malaya, as the Malay Peninsula is called—on her husband's rubber plantation; and 'quite right too,' was Dr Hewlett's comment on his host's last remark.

'Yes,' agreed Mr Meredyth doubtfully; 'quite right for me, but quite wrong for Mollie. Her head-mistress writes that Mollie is so insubordinate that if we lived in England she would ask us to remove her; but, as it is, she begs us to write severely to the child, and tell her she is to do what she is told, and not to imagine she knows better than her elders.'

'I never thought Mollie such a termagant. She was very good-tempered and obedient when she came to stay with us last summer at Broadstairs; in fact, she was the most popular girl on the sands and the ringleader in all the sports,' objected the doctor, who had been home with his wife a year ago, and had kindly invited Mollie and her brothers to spend their holidays with them at the seaside.

'Very likely she is fond of you and Mrs Hewlett, and enjoyed herself tremendously

with you, and naturally she did what she was told because she was not told to do anything she did not like ; but school is a different pair of shoes. She is popular there too, but leads the other girls into mischief. She had a mock funeral of herself the other day, and is in disgrace now, it appears (or was when she wrote), in consequence of it.'

Dr Hewlett looked puzzled, but laughed as he said, 'What was the idea of that? It sounds foolish, but not a criminal offence.'

Moll Meredyth's father looked grave for a minute, and then joined in the laughter, only to look grave again as he continued, 'She was ordered to keep within bounds, as they call it, which means apparently within a small railed-in garden, in which she was supposed to "promenade like the animals in the Zoo," as she puts it, and in full view of the playgrounds.'

'Rather tantalising,' put in the doctor.

'Well, it may not have been the wisest punishment for a girl of Moll's spirit. Anyway, to quote her own words again, as she was meant to be a spectacle for the public she thought she'd give them something to look at ; so she got a wheelbarrow, made it into a kind of hearse, and pushed it along, having dressed herself in deep mourning for her sins.'

The doctor broke into a roar of laughter.

'The imp! she got it from the 'varsity undergraduates. They ought to have taken no notice of her nonsense.'

'Her mother does not seem to think so; she was quite upset about it all, so don't say anything about it, or make a joke of it at tiffin, will you, if the wife mentions it?' observed the father, smiling.

'No, no, of course not, and, after all, Mrs Meredyth is right; Moll is at school to learn, not to play the fool; at her age too—fourteen, isn't she?' remarked the doctor, with a laudable desire to work himself and Mr Meredyth into a suitably shocked frame of mind at Moll's escapades before they met Mrs Meredyth.

To tell the truth, much though he liked Mr Meredyth and his daughter, he and a good many more people pitied Mrs Meredyth, who was herself a very quiet woman, for having such a harum-scarum husband and a daughter who promised to be a 'handful,' if she were not one now.

'You are just the man I wanted to see, doctor,' was Mrs Meredyth's smiling greeting.

'I am sorry to hear it, if it means that my services are wanted,' replied the doctor, taking his seat beside his hostess.

'Only as a friend; I want your advice,' she began:

'That's always at your disposal. What is

it? Nothing serious—no fever, I hope?’ he inquired, for, unconsciously, Mrs Meredyth’s face wore a rather worried expression.

‘Oh no, not illness, and I have not had a touch of fever for a year. I think this place is getting healthier now that they have cleared so much of the jungle; don’t you think so?’

‘Yes, it’s better than it was some years ago; a regular fever-hole it used to be when I first came here. I sometimes wonder whether we Britishers are wise in coming to tropical countries to ruin our health and spend the best part of our lives separated from our nearest and dearest,’ observed the doctor gloomily, for his wife spent most of her time in England with their children, and the doctor missed them terribly.

‘That is just what I wanted to consult you about. I feel that though it is necessary to send one’s boys away for their education, there is not the same necessity to part with one’s daughter,’ observed Mrs Meredyth.

Dr Hewlett looked his surprise. ‘You want to bring Moll out here?’ he asked.

‘Yes, I want her under my eye. Of course I want my girl; but I should not be so selfish as to bring her out if I thought it was for her good to stay in England. It certainly is not doing her good as regards her character, and the only point to decide is whether it

would be bad for her health to come out here. What is your opinion, doctor ?'

The doctor shook his head. 'Better leave her at home, Mrs Meredyth ; the Straits is no place for a young girl. It is bad enough for old people, but you don't want her to look like the rest of us,' he replied. But, even as he said it, he felt pretty sure that Mrs Meredyth had made up her mind to have her daughter out, unless he actually condemned the idea.

And he was not much surprised when, at the end of their conversation, she observed, 'I am glad at least that you agree with me that it is possible to live here and be healthy in spite of malaria and heat ; and, after all, if we can have her out for a few months it will be better than my leaving my husband in this treacherous climate.'

Dr Hewlett smiled to himself at this contradictory speech, and thought that he knew from whence Moll got some of her self-will ; but he only said, 'Lots of girls do live in Singapore, and though they look rather washed out, as I said before, compared with English rosy-cheeked maidens, still they manage to keep well ; and if you have made up your mind to have her, why, I must keep my eye on her too, and between us let us hope she will flourish.'

Mrs Meredyth looked relieved that the idea

was not scouted as impossible by the doctor, and next set to work to tackle Mr Meredyth, who was as surprised as the doctor, and far more vehement in his protests.

‘Never! I’d sooner you went home; I shall be able to get away next year myself. I would rather be alone here for a year than bring Moll out.’

‘By why, Eustace? The Sullimans have never sent their daughters home, and they are never ill.’

‘Sulliman could not afford it; or he would have; besides, Singapore is not the jungle with all its dangers. I should never have a moment’s peace if she were here, running the risk of being carried off by a tiger, or bitten by a snake or scorpion; to say nothing of fever. No, let her stay in England where one does not carry one’s life in one’s hand, so to speak,’ exclaimed Mr Meredyth, mopping his brow again, for in spite of the punkah he had succeeded in working himself up into a fine state of heat.

The doctor and Mrs Meredyth looked at him, and involuntarily caught each other’s eye. Then the doctor burst into hearty and prolonged laughter, and even Mrs Meredyth smiled.

‘It’s nothing to laugh at,’ said Mr Meredyth.

‘I beg your pardon, Meredyth, for my un-

seemly merriment, but really the picture you conjure up of life in this peaceful bungalow is worthy of a writer for a "penny-dreadful." I begin to marvel that we have lived here all these years without having met with any of these dangers,' protested the doctor.

'We happen to be sensible people who do not run into danger; but with a madcap like Moll I should never feel safe,' observed Mr Meredyth.

'I will undertake to look after her safety,' observed Mrs Meredyth quietly.

Her husband saw, as the doctor had done before him, that Mrs Meredyth had made up her mind to have her daughter with her, and on the rare occasions that she asserted herself she had her way. 'When do you mean to have her out, and who is going to take care of her? It's a pity she's too late to come with Ken, if she really is coming,' he remarked.

'I don't think it is too late if we cable,' said Mrs Meredyth.

Mr Meredyth gave vent to a long *whew*. 'This is quick work; Ken starts next week by the P. & O.,' he exclaimed.

'That gives us ten days, and I have a code cable ready here if you approve,' said his wife.

Mr Meredyth was silent for a minute. 'As you wish, my dear. If she's coming, she had better come now; it is the best time, and

Kenneth is as good as a brother and as steady as old Time. She will be as safe under his charge as she would be with any one. Well, we shall see the minx in a month. To think of that! I must confess her last letter made me long to have the child within hail. It will be nice having her.—Eh, doctor?’

‘Very nice,’ agreed the doctor, and said no more, for he saw it would be useless, and, after all, other Europeans did keep their children with them, and he only chuckled a little to himself over Mr Meredyth’s quick surrender and complacence in a plan to which he had so vehemently objected a few minutes before; but that was his friend’s character, as he knew by experience.

Mrs Meredyth accordingly took the motor into Johore, and sent off her lengthy cablegrams.

The Meredyths were very well off, and a few pounds for a telegram was nothing to them.

The feelings with which the two cables were received were very different, and require a new chapter to explain them.

CHAPTER II.

MOLL MEREDYTH, MADCAP.

THE cablegrams were addressed to Mr Meredyth's brother, whose son Ken—or, to give him his full name, Mr Kenneth Meredyth, junior—was assistant to his uncle on his rubber estate, and was now taking a holiday at home, the which holiday was now coming to an end.

A greater contrast to Eustace Meredyth than the Kenneth Meredyths, father and son, could hardly be imagined. Mr Kenneth Meredyth, senior, was a grave, stern man—a day spent in whose house by his niece Moll had been 'enough for her,' as she announced, and, it may be added, enough for her uncle and his family. At all events, it was the first and last time she was asked there; although her aunt used regularly to go to the school to visit her, and took her for a drive and to lunch or tea somewhere. But to the house she never came again, for she and her uncle and Ken did not get on well.

When, therefore, the lengthy cablegrams were opened by Mr Kenneth Meredyth, senior, his remark was, 'They must be mad.' And when his wife heard the news she was inclined to agree with her husband.

As for Moll's cousin, when he understood that he was expected to 'chaperon' Moll to Singapore he flatly refused. 'Me look after Moll for four blessed weeks—nothing would induce me to undertake such a thing! I can't imagine what Aunt Eulalie is thinking of to suggest such a thing. If it were Uncle Eustace I should not be surprised; there's no knowing what he will take into his head to do next, as we all know very well on the estate; but Aunt Eulalie has her head screwed on the right way, and I do wonder at her.'

'Do I understand you to say that your uncle's management of the estate is unreliable?' inquired his father gravely. He was a business man by nature, and had a large share in this same estate.

'Oh no; he's all right as a rubber-planter. The estate is very well run—one of the best about; but he leads us assistants a dance at times, though every one likes him—you can't help it. But that's not the point just now. I can't possibly take Moll out with me; and what they mean by having her out in the middle of her school term I don't know,' he added.

'They mean that the school authorities won't keep her any longer, and small blame to them. An impertinent chit, I call her,' said his father, who could not endure Moll.

‘If all those women who are trained to it can’t manage Moll, it’s not likely I can, and, what’s more, I won’t. She won’t attend to a word I say, you may be sure of that; and she’ll probably try to climb the masts and refuse to come down for the captain, and I shall be led the life of a dog,’ gloomily observed Ken, who knew his cousin well.

‘She may be subdued now after this last disgrace,’ observed his mother.

‘Then perhaps they’ll keep her,’ suggested Ken.

‘I am afraid not; but we may find some kind lady going by your boat who will look after Moll,’ continued Mrs Kenneth Meredyth.

‘In that case I suppose she’ll have to come with me, unless’—here Ken Meredyth’s face brightened in a way not flattering to Moll—‘unless there is no vacant berth, and I hope to goodness there is not,’ he muttered.

However, on ringing up the P. & O., it was found that there was a berth, and it was also found that there were exceptionally few ladies going by that particular boat, and they mostly young married ladies.

Kenneth groaned when he saw the list. Of the few he knew, none were likely to trouble their heads about Moll; but even his father declared that he must take care—the best care he could—of his cousin. Mrs Meredyth

motored down to the school, which was some miles out of London, and arrived with the cable to be shown to the head-mistress. The other cable had given private directions to the Kenneth Meredyths.

Miss Bates was as surprised as every one else had been. 'I am very sorry to lose her,' she said.

'But I understood that you found her too insubordinate!' observed the visitor, surprised in her turn at this reception of her news.

'That is true—no girl has ever given me so much trouble; but I like her in spite of it. One cannot help loving the girl; moreover, I do not like failing in managing a girl who is not bad and has only high spirits and disobedience against her,' said the head-mistress.

However, there was nothing to be done but to obey her parents' commands, and Mrs Meredyth asked that her niece might be sent for.

'She will be wild with excitement; I believe she gets very home-sick for her parents at times, and it is only natural,' remarked Miss Bates, ringing the bell, and suppressing a sigh of regret that her mischievous pupil's school career should be thus abruptly cut short. It was her own doing really; she had written that letter in a moment of exasperation. But that was a month ago, and since then Moll had been fairly well-behaved; besides, she had

not imagined it possible that the girl would be removed, or she would probably not have suggested such a thing.

Mrs Meredyth sympathised with Miss Bates's feelings, and determined to repress unseemly delight on the part of her unruly niece.

A scuffle and stifled laughter were heard in the passage; and then the door opened, and there entered a sturdy, well-built girl of fourteen, with fresh round face and gray eyes that twinkled with laughter, while she tried to purse up her mouth and look serious enough to enter the presence of her principal.

At sight of her aunt she gave a cry of delight, for Moll Meredyth was an affectionate girl, and she liked her uncle's wife far better than she did her uncle. Then at sight of their grave faces her own changed, and she exclaimed, 'There is nothing wrong—no bad news? Father and mother are well? And the boys?'

'They are all quite well,' began Mrs Meredyth; but as Moll's spirits showed signs of rising at this good news, she added, 'but I have come to tell you serious news. You are going out to your parents next week.'

Again Moll's expressive face changed. 'Then they are ill, or something must be the matter. Oh, please, tell me the truth—why am I to go out?' she cried impatiently.

'You are going because we cannot manage you here,' said Miss Bates a little bitterly; and Mrs Meredyth could not help feeling that she was rather injudicious and not quite the person to manage a high-spirited girl like Moll Meredyth.

'Do you mean that you are sending me away? That you won't keep me any longer?' she demanded of her schoolmistress, her eyes flashing.

'Moll, do not speak to Miss Bates like that,' protested her aunt.

'I don't care; it's mean of her to go and have me taken away when I've been trying to behave properly for a whole month,' said Moll.

'Moll, be silent,' said Miss Bates severely. 'I have nothing to do with it, and this news is as great a surprise to me as it is to you. I certainly wrote a letter of complaint of your conduct a month ago, as it was my duty to do, but I did not anticipate this result.'

'Then you don't want me to leave?' asked Moll, who, it will be noted, did not attempt to apologise for her violent and impertinent language.

'No, Moll; you have given me a great deal of trouble, but I am sorry you are leaving me like this, and just now,' said Miss Bates; and it will also be noted that she did not demand an apology.

Mrs Meredyth noticed both these facts, and began to feel that perhaps her sister-in-law's plan was not so unwise as to leave her here, where she certainly was not kept in proper order.

But Moll thought otherwise, and turning to her aunt said calmly, 'Then I am not going to leave this school.'

'My dear Moll!' protested Miss Bates. Every one, even her teachers, called her Moll, although she had been christened Mary, which baptismal name she repudiated with her usual lawlessness.

'I am sorry, but it is too late to alter your future plans. You are to go out to Singapore with your cousin Kenneth next week in the P. & O.,' announced Mrs Meredyth with decision.

'With Ken! That I won't. He'd be saying don't do this and don't do that the whole time; I should lead the life of a dog with him. Aunt, please cable to mother to say I want to stop here, and that Miss Bates wants it too.— You do, don't you?' said Moll.

But Mrs Meredyth declined to do any such thing; and, in spite of Moll's vehement objections, declared that she must be ready to start in a week's time, not even smiling, although somewhat amused, at Moll's unconscious echoing of Kenneth.

At last Miss Bates came to the rescue with a suggestion. 'Supposing we cable to Malaya to say that Moll feels leaving very keenly, and that I share her feelings on that point, and that we should be glad to be allowed to hope that she will return in a year, when she will be older and, we will trust, wiser,' she proposed.

'I will certainly send that cable,' agreed Mrs Meredyth, who saw the objection to a sudden disappearance in the middle of the term.

'Say I won't come unless they promise that,' amended Moll. But this amendment, as may be supposed, was lost, and Miss Bates's suggested cable brought a prompt and satisfactory reply.

'I hope you told her she was to behave herself if she came with me,' observed Ken, when he found that everything was arranged and that he was indeed doomed to be responsible for his cousin for the next three or four weeks.

'I think she is improved,' said his mother.

Ken gave a disbelieving grunt. 'She need not think she is going to do as she likes with me,' he said with great want of gallantry.

'She does not think so; in fact, she is no more anxious to go with you than you are to take her,' Mrs Meredyth could not help saying

to her son, who, though not unamiable, was not showing an amiable spirit on this occasion, and she could not help smiling as she repeated Moll's fear (identical with his own) that she was going to have a dog's life with him.

Ken laughed too. 'Oh well, I suppose I shall have to put up with her, and if she gets obstreperous I shall appeal to the captain,' he observed; and resigned himself to his fate with what grace he could.

Miss Bates meanwhile, with great kindness and tact, made much of Moll this last week, so as to prevent her feeling that she was being removed as unmanageable, and it was spoken of as a year's absence. 'In which I hope you will learn as much as you would have done at school,' said Miss Bates.

'I shall learn a lot of geography and botany, and all about animals and things; but I sha'n't learn proper school-lessons, because there is no school near us. We live in the jungle,' said Moll, who had been born at Bukit Ayer fourteen years before, and stayed there till she was four years old.

'The jungle! How awful! Aren't there buffaloes and tigers and all sorts of wild beasts there?' cried a schoolfellow.

'Yes, right in the jungle; but they don't come near the bungalow,' said Moll carelessly.

'I shouldn't care about buffaloes and tigers

much, but I would love to see the jungle, with gorgeous flowering trees and birds-of-paradise and beautiful butterflies ; I love barbaric colouring,' said an older girl, who posed as artistic and was considered to put on 'side.'

'What's it like, anyway, Moll? Are there really tigers and horrid creatures like that all round you? Aren't you afraid?' asked another girl.

'Afraid! What of? Tigers? They don't come into the house or gardens, and I don't suppose they are allowed on the estate. If there were any danger, mother would not have me there, nor be there herself. There are tigers, I know, because father goes for tiger-hunts sometimes with the Rajah, and he shot a man-eater the other day, which he is having stuffed ; but I don't remember much about Bukit Ayer. Oh won't it be delightful seeing father and mother again! You girls who go home every holiday don't know what I feel when I see you go off and am left behind myself.'

'Mind you write and describe it all, and send us some bird-of-paradise wings,' said her friend.

'All I know about Singapore is that pine-apples come from there. You can't send us some of those, I suppose?' suggested another.

'Singapore where the pine-apples come from,' laughed Moll, and so in laughter and chatter

the play-times till she went were spent ; and a day before the boat sailed, Moll went up to town to her uncle's house.

The last evening at school they gave Moll a surprise party (by Miss Bates's kind permission), and her great popularity was shown on the occasion by the numerous souvenirs she received and the number of the guests, which included the whole of the upper school.

Moll was more touched than she chose to show ; but she was in the highest of spirits, as was evident by her parting speech.

'Ladies and others—the others can take that as they like it—I am deeply gratified at the thought of leaving you'—howls of disapproval—'don't interrupt—leaving you with such gratifying proofs of your admiration and esteem, which has been merited by my uniform good behaviour' ('For shame, Moll!' came from the elder girls), 'and which is the only possible explanation of the august condescension of the Sixth in attending this solemn funeral.' Some of the Sixth showed signs of getting up and going at this audacious allusion to Moll's last prank, whereupon that young lady, who always knew when she had gone far enough, and could withdraw if she chose, continued this funeral of her past bad self by their late schoolfellow, 'who will be resurrected a year hence, all being well, a reformed character.'

Her concluding remarks having mollified them, the party broke up more amicably than it had promised to do, and Moll departed next morning amid a storm of cheers and good wishes, and fervent hopes that she would have a 'good time and come back safe and sound a year hence.'

How those wishes were fulfilled, and what kind of a time Moll had, will be told in the following chapters.

CHAPTER III.

SINGAPORE.

'MOLL!' Then came a rap at Moll's cabin-door.

'What's the row?' called out that young lady from within.

'Singapore,' was Ken Meredyth's laconic answer; and he mentally added, 'thank goodness!'

'Singapore—good gracious!' screamed Moll, and a great scuttling about was heard within; and then Moll's head appeared, framed in the door curtain, as she said in tones of excitement, 'Are we really there? What on earth do they mean by arriving in the middle of the night? I'm not dressed. Tell mother to come down here.'

'It's not the middle of the night. If you did not stay in bed after every one else was up you would be dressed like all the rest of us,' retorted her cousin severely.

'Don't stand there lecturing me; your rule is over, thank goodness. Go and fetch mother; I am dying to see her,' declared Moll.

'She is not on board; we have not arrived yet. I thought I had better rouse you beforehand,' he explained.

'You could have done that without up-

setting me and shattering my nerves with your untruthfulness, I should think,' complained Moll, alluding to his reply to her that Singapore was the matter.

'That's all the thanks one gets from you. For gratitude, commend me to girls, and as for untruthfulness, if you look out of the porthole you will see Singapore, which we shall reach before you are half-ready, and Aunt Eulalie will think there is something the matter when she finds you are not on deck looking out for her,' was Kenneth Meredyth's parting shot before he turned to go on deck.

But his last words had to be addressed to a closed door, for Moll had shut it in his face, and was furiously throwing on her clothes—the first that came to hand—so as to be up before the boat anchored.

Such was her speed that they had not come within hail of the dock before her cousin heard a voice saying, 'What a lot of canoes, and what hideous-looking wretches those Malays in them; are.'

He turned with surprise to see Moll, her face aglow with delight at the thought that she would soon see her parents, and not as untidy as might have been expected from her hasty toilet. True, her hair did not look so elaborately arranged as it had been during the voyage, and her brooch, Kenneth noticed with

his habitual keen-sightedness, was crooked. However, he wisely abstained from making any remark upon Moll's personal appearance, nor upon her expeditious toilet, but observed, 'They are not canoes; they are *sampans*, and these don't happen to be Malays, who are not hideous wretches at all, but a nice-looking race as a rule.'

'It wouldn't be you if you didn't contradict. These boats are just like canoes, and if these are not natives, what are they, pray?' demanded Moll, who was leaning over the rail, and watching the crowd of small boats following alongside up the Straits. '

'These are Chinese; I should have thought you would have known that. There are some little Malay boys diving for coins. I think some of them very pretty; don't you?'

'No, I can't bear blacks,' declared Moll.

'Blacks!' began Kenneth in a protesting tone; but then he bethought himself that it was a waste of time arguing with Moll, who could see for herself that Malays were brown, not black, and that she was probably only calling them so out of opposition to aggravate him, and said no more.

Moll watched the chattering, grinning crowd of Asiatics half-impatiently; though it was a strange enough scene, and interesting too, for she wanted to see which of the white-clad

people on yonder pier, whose faces she could not yet distinguish, would turn out to be her parents.

‘Ken, have I been a great nuisance?’ she demanded abruptly of her cousin, turning her bright, mischievous face to him with a more serious expression on it than was habitual to her.

Kenneth Meredyth looked down from his superior height of six feet one inch upon her, smiling good-naturedly. He thought she was afraid that he was going to make some complaint of her conduct during the voyage, which, it must be admitted, had been trying at times, and he answered, ‘Not as bad as you might have been. Anyway, we’ll start in the East with a clean sheet, and let bygones be bygones; and so you need not be afraid of my peaching.’

Her cousin meant it kindly, and was quite unprepared for the scorn with which his reply was greeted.

‘Afraid! I afraid of anything? Besides, I’m not afraid of your telling mother anything; I shall tell her all about the voyage myself. I didn’t mean that. But it’s no good explaining to you; you wouldn’t understand.’

‘If you mean were you a bother to me, you weren’t much trouble; and though you led Mr Symes rather a dance, he deserved it,’ said

Kenneth, who was not as dense as Moll seemed to imagine, and guessed that she had meant to apologise for any trouble she had given him, which he was bound to own had not been as much as he had expected.

But Moll's soft moment was gone. 'Oh that old fidget! He was a nuisance, if you like, wanting the whole ship to be kept like a rest-cure, and no one to speak above a whisper,' she retorted.

'You need not have persisted in pretending he was deaf and had to be shouted at,' said Kenneth.

The remark was wasted, for Moll was not attending to him; she was leaning forward over the rail and gazing at the still distant pier. 'It is—it is they!' she cried excitedly, and began waving her handkerchief.

It seemed an eternity until the P. & O. liner came to a standstill at the dockside, and even then there was a tantalising wait while the gangway was let down and the eager crowd of Europeans came hurrying up the ladder, jostling each other in their anxiety to get to their friends and relatives on board.

'Glad to see you, Ken, my boy. Awfully good of you to be bothered with this young lady; I hope she has not been a great nuisance to you. It was asking a big favour of you, but we'll get even with you some day,' said

Moll's father, clapping his nephew heartily on the back.

'That's all right, Uncle Eustace. She was no bother at all, I can assure you, and was a great acquisition on board—the most popular passenger, in fact,' replied Kenneth.

'What gammon, Ken! you know you hardly dared go into the smoke-room and leave me alone.—He's had the life of a dog this voyage, only he's too polite to say so to your face,' observed Moll, who despite the heat was clinging to her mother.

'Sit down quietly, Moll; it's too hot to get excited on the equator, so to speak. This place will take some of the energy out of you, I expect, and so much the better; it's time you quieted down,' said her father, looking, all the same, with undisguised pride at his handsome daughter, whose red cheeks were so refreshing after the pale, washed-out complexions that are the rule in the East.

Mrs Meredyth was the quietest of the party. She was never a demonstrative person, and the sight of her daughter seemed to make her graver than usual. The fact was that her heart misgave her when she realised that she had brought this girl, looking the picture of health, to a place where few people managed to keep well, and many fell victims to fever, and she did not regard with complacence (as her

husband seemed to do) the thought that Moll would lose her activity in this climate.

Moll had no forebodings, and laughed as she mopped her face. 'It's like an everlasting Turkish bath. But you look awfully white, mother! Have you been ill?'

'Not lately; that is my tropical complexion. I am afraid you will soon look just as white, Mollie dear,' said her mother half-sadly.

'I only hope I shall; it has been the dream of my life to be pale and emaciated,' said Moll gaily.

'It isn't the dream of my life to see you so, and if I see any sign of it, off you go to England, and your mother with you,' said her father.

'No fear; I shall never get white. All that the sun does to me is to make me as red as a brick or an overheated cook. Surely you don't like me to look like this?' remarked Moll, who caught a glimpse of her crimson, heated face in the mirror opposite which they were sitting. What with the excitement and her wild haste in dressing, Moll had got herself into a great state of heat, which is an easy thing to do at Singapore.

'We have some hours before the train goes for Bukit Ayer, so I think we had better go and have tiffin at Raffles', and then take a motor and show Moll round a bit. What do

you say, Eulalie? Is it too hot?' inquired Mr Meredyth.

'Lovely,' interposed Moll; 'I don't feel as hot here as I did at sea. If this is all the equator is, I don't mind sitting on it for the rest of my life. But, mother, before we go I want to introduce you to some friends I have made.'

Kenneth Meredyth laughed. 'I had better warn you that Moll has made friends with all the passengers more or less, and has been issuing invitations broadcast to come and see her.'

'Quite right too; the more the merrier,' said Mr Meredyth with true Eastern hospitality.

'I hope they are nice people, Moll,' said her mother, looking a little doubtfully at a noisy group not far off, who were nodding and beckoning to Moll.

'I have choked a few of them off, and told them all that we are at the seventeenth mile, which, I think, will discourage a good many,' observed Kenneth in an undertone to his aunt.

The seventeenth mile, it may be explained, meant that the Meredyths' bungalow was seventeen miles along the road from the nearest town, from which distances were counted by miles.

'You will be glad to see them, mother, won't you?' inquired Moll, leading her mother up to one group after another.

‘Certainly.—I hope, if you find yourselves near Bukit Ayer, you will come and see us,’ was Mrs Meredyth’s courteous response in most cases; while to a girl of seventeen, who had come out on a visit to her married sister, she gave a cordial invitation to come and stay, if her sister would spare her.

‘Oh mother, how horrid! I could not really—I could not get into that dreadful little carriage and have a woman for a horse!’ cried Moll vehemently at sight of the rickshaws drawn up on the wharf ready for fares.

‘Don’t be ridiculous, Moll. For goodness’ sake don’t make a scene; you’re attracting every one’s attention!’ cried her father.

‘Get in, Moll; it is quite safe. These men are quite used to draw ladies about,’ urged her mother gently.

But Moll had had a month of spoiling and independence, except for Kenneth’s ‘rule,’ as she called it, which chiefly consisted in keeping guard over her and putting in a gentle expostulation now and then, and she was excited as well; so she sat down upon a box by the wharfside and declared obstinately, ‘Never! I’m not tired. I’ll walk, if you like, but use women as horses I won’t; it’s cruelty to animals. I wonder at father!’

‘Women? What are you talking about? Those are men—Chinamen, and as strong as

horses,' said her father, who was in his rickshaw, and waiting for Moll to let Ken help her into hers.

'Men! they don't look like men. What have they got chignons for?' demanded Moll, looking curiously at the rickshaw pullers, who were standing grinning at a scene they did not quite understand, though they guessed that the new-comer, as often happened, was objecting for some reason to their rickshaws.

By this time most of the passengers who had no cars had got into rickshaws, and called out to Moll Meredyth to follow their example.

'It's very disgraceful, and worse than slavery,' observed Moll, as she reluctantly allowed herself to be handed into her rickshaw, which her Chinaman immediately lifted up, put himself into the shafts, and started off with the peculiar jumpy jog-trot of rickshaw coolies.

Ken made no remark as he politely held out his hand to his cousin; but he gave a sigh of relief when, having at length settled her, he was able to get into his own rickshaw and say, '*Pegi!*' with more violence than was usual to him.

'Are you calling your driver a pig?' inquired Moll, who happened to be alongside of him.

'No, certainly not. *Pegi* means "Go on."—*Pegi! pegi!*' he repeated.

‘Well, you all talk to these natives as if they were pigs,’ remarked Moll, by which she meant that the tone assumed by Europeans to Asiatics was not so considerate as it would be to inferiors in England.

‘This is not China,’ observed Kenneth.

‘Not China? What has that to do with it? Oh I see, these men-women (they aren’t proper men with this bunch of hair) are Chinese. Well, even so, you need not talk to them in that contemptuous tone.’

‘For goodness’ sake, don’t begin that; you don’t know anything about the matter,’ said Kenneth, roused at last; and added, ‘We shall have to change the name of the estate from Bukit Ayer to Ayer Paras, for that’s what we shall be in now you’ve come.’

‘I don’t know what you mean, but I’m sure it’s something rude, so perhaps it’s just as well I don’t,’ observed Moll.

CHAPTER IV.

MOLL AT RAFFLES' HOTEL, AND HER VIEWS UPON THE WORLD.

BUT Moll ended her remark with a prolonged 'Oh!' and a jerk, as her rickshaw coolie, having run up to the portico of Raffles' famous hotel, dropped the shafts, and pitched Moll out, sprawling, on to the stone steps.

Half-a-dozen men, who were sitting lazily smoking on the veranda, rushed forward to pick Moll up and to anathematise the Chinaman, who, frightened and defiant, was trying to excuse himself from any blame in the matter.

Kenneth sprang from his rickshaw, as did Mr Meredyth, who said, with a hearty laugh, 'Well, you've distinguished yourself, Moll. I should think you are the first young lady who has managed to arrive at Raffles' head foremost out of a rickshaw.—That's all right! *Pegi! pegi!*' he called out to the protesting coolie, to whom he tossed his fare.

'Are you hurt, Mollie?' asked her mother quietly, looking a little vexed.

She was reassured by a merry peal of laughter from Moll, who said gaily, 'No, thank goodness; but how was I to know they were going to drop the thing like that?'

'How else did you expect to get out?' demanded Kenneth.

'As you get out of an ordinary carriage, I should imagine. You don't generally drop the shafts on the ground to get out. I'll never go in another rickshaw again—never! If I can't have a proper carriage I'll walk, if it's ten miles; I don't mind a ten-mile walk a bit,' said Moll.

'No one walks here, Miss Meredyth,' said a man whom her father introduced to her.

'Why not?' asked Moll.

'Well, because it's hot, for one thing; besides, it's not the thing—only Asiatics walk in the East.'

'It's quite as hot in England on a summer day; besides, I saw some people playing tennis as I came along; that's hotter than walking?'

'Ah, that's a different thing; one must keep up the prestige of the European, and to walk anywhere is quite beneath our dignity,' he answered quite seriously.

Moll thought he was teasing her, so did not reply, and was reluctantly dragged in to breakfast.

'Aren't you hungry, Moll; you have had nothing to eat since last night?' inquired her mother.

Moll laughed. 'I suppose I am, but the excitement of seeing you made me forget it, and

it is so interesting looking at all these funny people. They are all different colours; I suppose some tan more than others,' she observed, looking back at the street, which she seemed to find a fascinating occupation. It was not till afterwards that Moll learnt that the different shades of 'tan' were due to different nationalities.

In the vast hotel dining-room Mr and Mrs Meredyth found an old friend, who begged them to come to his table.

'But we are four,' demurred Mrs Meredyth, for the table only held four.

'That's all right, Aunt Eulalie; I see some planters over there I want to speak to,' said Kenneth.

And as his aunt guessed that he would prefer the society of his young men-friends, they divided.

'I say, Meredyth, your cousin looks awfully young to be out,' observed one of his friends.

'She isn't out, if you mean in society; she's only fourteen, and is still at school,' explained Kenneth.

'She looks young for fourteen. What on earth has she come out here for?' he asked; for European girls of that age, unless their parents could not afford to send them home, were never brought out to Malaya, as the Malay Peninsula is called.

'Her mother wanted to see her, and couldn't,

or wouldn't, go home and leave my uncle,' observed Kenneth, who did not choose to say she was too much of a handful for her school-mistress.

'It's a funny thing, the sight of that child makes me feel more home-sick than I've felt since I've been out here. It's so refreshing to hear a girl laugh like a girl; it reminds me of my sister. I've a good mind to put in for leave and go home and see them all,' the young man remarked.

'The best thing you can do. I feel as fit as a fiddle after my six months at home; the only drawback was that the time was so short,' said Kenneth, and he smiled to himself at the thought that his madcap cousin should have had such a good influence in her first hour in the East. It was not to be the last time that this thought was to strike him with surprise, and it was a long time before he gave Moll credit for being anything but a harum-scarum young person, born to be a trouble and source of agitation to her relatives. However, he was too loyal to say anything against his cousin, and agreed that she was 'a jolly little thing, with plenty of sense if she chose,' which, he did not add, was not often.

Moll, meanwhile, was amusing her parents' old friend by her views on the East.

'Now that you have travelled so far and

seen so much of the world, what do you think of it?' he inquired, smiling.

'The world? Not much,' observed Moll calmly, as she helped herself to a banana.

'I don't fancy Moll has quite such big thinks as that,' observed her mother in her quiet voice, to which, somehow, people always paid attention, perhaps because, in spite of her gentleness, she had such strength of character.

'Oh yes, I have; I have thought a lot. Board ship is like a little world—the captain used that very expression; I learnt a lot about the world on board ship, and I don't think much of it.'

'Why not, Miss Moll? I should like to hear your reasons for your poor opinion of the world; they would be edifying,' he remarked, chaffing.

Moll gazed at him, her gray eyes looking dark, as they did on the rare occasions that she was grave, or on the more frequent occasions when she was excited. 'People are not serious enough,' she said.

Old Mr Clough was surprised. 'I should not have thought you were such a serious person yourself; but that's not answering my question. I asked about the world, not the people in it,' he replied.

'Oh you mean the scenery? Some of it was very pretty; but, you know, I was awfully

disappointed. I think travelling about is dreadfully disappointing; you expect to be surprised and you never are, except disagreeably — just as I am at this very minute,' remarked Moll.

Her mother looked at Moll in amazement. She thought she knew her daughter, who told her everything, but she had not suspected her of so much thought; and though she determined that the girl should not monopolise so much attention in future, she could not help being interested in this glimpse into Moll's mind, and so did not check her.

'Upon my word, we ought to feel flattered. And, pray, how have your mother and I disappointed you, Moll? Do we look washed-out and old, eh?' inquired Mr Meredyth.

'Oh father! of course I did not mean that! You and mother are just the two things that have not disappointed me. I was not thinking of you at all!' cried Moll in eager protest.

'Then it is I. What have I done?' asked Mr Clough.

Moll, her grave mood over, laughed as she said, her eyes twinkling with fun, 'It's something far more serious than you; it's this banana,' she declared.

'Nonsense, Moll; what stuff you are talking,' protested her father.

'It's a fact. I always thought bananas so woolly in England, and I expected when I tasted them fresh they would be nice and juicy, and they are no better than the horrid things you get for a halfpenny in London, and that is disappointing, and so were the oranges. We picked some in the hotel garden at Naples, and they weren't even sweet, and hothouse grapes at home are much nicer than the ones we got at the railway stations in Italy; and yet when you read books of travel you are told how delicious the fruit is and how wonderful everything is, and it isn't,' wound up Moll.

'Meredyth, this daughter of yours has hit the right nail on the head; I've often thought myself how misleading books of travel are. The fact is, people know they are expected to tell of wonders, or else their books won't sell, so they magnify ordinary sights into wonders,' replied Mr Clough.

'Not quite that; they see things with an artistic eye; and as for the fruit, you wait till you are thirsty, as one can only be in a hot climate, and see if you don't find an orange more refreshing than it is in England, to say nothing of papaias and mangosteens—oh mangosteens! they are the most delicious fruit ever grown, except, perhaps, a custard apple, and papelos. She must taste papelos, mustn't she, mother?' cried Mr Meredyth.

'There you go, Meredyth, travellers' raptures again. I dare say Moll won't care for any of those fruits; but I know what she will like,' and he called out, 'Boy,' and gave an order to him in Malay; and, although a Chinaman, he as usual spoke Malay, the language of the country.

The 'boy' soon returned with a large pineapple.

'Oh the girls were envying me for tasting Singapore pine-apples,' laughed Moll.

'Well, they are not the best, as a matter of fact,' her father warned her.

But Mr Clough had ordered the 'boy' to bring him the very ripest and juiciest pineapple that was to be had, and after tasting it, Moll said with a sigh of mock relief, 'At last I have found something that does not disappoint me; but, after all, it is not the fruit I have been looking forward to out here—it's the jungle.'

'Oh you'll have plenty of jungle; in fact, you'll be right in the middle of it at Bukit Ayer. I expect you'll long for civilisation after a month or two of that,' said Mr Clough.

If Moll had mentioned what she expected the jungle to be she would probably have been saved another disappointment; but Mrs Meredyth, much as she liked to hear the voice of the daughter whom she had not seen for two

years, thought she had talked enough, and changed the conversation till breakfast was over, and then there was a motor-drive round the island of Singapore, which lasted until they took the train for Bukit Ayer, which was some twenty miles up on the mainland.

This drive was not a disappointment, to judge from Moll's eager cries of delight as they drove along shady roads, with coconut palms, hibiscus hedges red with their graceful flowers, trees encrusted with ferns and orchids and other beautiful parasites, so that wherever one turned it was a wealth of rich verdure.

'How funny! I expected everything would look dried up, and instead of that it is greener than Ireland. They ought to call this the Emerald Isle!' she cried at last.

'So you are surprised, after all,' was her father's comment, as he turned round and smiled at his daughter's fresh, eager face.

'I am,' said Moll emphatically.

An hour in the train took them across the island and the narrow strait that divides Singapore from Johore to the mainland, and on to Kuala, the nearest station to Bukit Ayer, and there Mr Meredyth's motor was waiting, and into it they all got.

Mrs Meredyth and her daughter, sitting in the back of the car together, talked in low

tones to each other, and to her mother Moll confided her real thoughts and the real disappointment.

'It's the natives, mother; you always said the Malays were such nice, polite people, and yet every one shouts at them as if they were doing what was wrong all the time.'

Mrs Meredyth smiled quietly. 'To tell you the truth, Moll, the Malays generally are; but you must not make the mistake people coming out from Britain generally make of thinking that they are ill-treated because one does not speak to them so gently as one does to English servants; they would not understand that tone; and as for the rickshaws, it's just habit; moreover, they are Chinamen, and can be very offensive on occasions. Everybody talks like you at first; but you are not so heavy as a wheelbarrow full of stones, or even earth, and our gardeners at home don't think themselves slaves for wheeling those things along.'

'I never thought of that!' cried Moll. 'Oh mother, it is nice being with you again; you explain things so splendidly, and make me understand what puzzles me,' and Moll squeezed her mother's hand.

Mrs Meredyth smiled, and the misgivings she had been troubled by in Singapore disappeared in her satisfaction at understanding and being understood by her daughter.

Later on the misgivings returned, as will be shown; but whether Moll's visit to the East was a mistake or not must be left to the reader to decide at the end of the story.

An hour's motoring brought the party to Bukit Ayer Rubber Estate and to Mr Meredyth's bungalow, which was, so far, the greatest surprise Moll had met with, and a description of which must be kept for a new chapter, when Moll's life in the jungle of the Malay Peninsula began.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE JUNGLE.

ALL the trees in this wood seem to be the same,' observed Moll.

They were nearing the end of their drive and were going at a good speed, which perhaps accounted for her not noticing that they were passing through plantations and not natural woodland.

'Why, these are rubber plantations, Moll. I thought you knew what a rubber-tree was like,' replied her mother.

'Oh rubber! of course, and there are the little cups to catch the juice. Are these father's trees?'

'Not yet, but we are nearly on the estate. See, there is our bungalow among those trees,' Mrs Meredyth said, after another mile or two.

'Our bungalow! But—but where is the jungle? I thought we lived in the jungle!' cried Moll, standing up in the car to get a better view of the country round and the bungalow.

'Take care, Moll!' cried her mother as the car turned sharp round to the right and up a rough road between rubber-trees.

Moll was *not* taking care, as usual, and fell back with some force on to the cushioned seat,

which, however, did not hurt her, and, as usual, she laughed heartily as she said, 'They ought to have blown the hooter; I wanted to see the jungle.'

'What do you mean, Moll? You have passed through miles and miles of jungle and said it was very pretty,' objected her mother, puzzled.

'I never noticed any; I have only seen green woods to-day, mother,' declared Moll.

Her mother looked at her daughter to see if she were in earnest, and seeing that she apparently was, remarked, 'I don't know what you imagined jungle to be; but surely you know that jungle is just the word for a thick wood out here?'

Moll in her turn stared at her mother. 'Do you really mean, mother, that the jungle is only green trees?' And as her mother did not contradict her, she repeated, 'Nothing but ordinary green trees, just like England,' in a tone of such disappointment that Mr Meredyth, who overheard, turned round and laughed.

'What! Another disappointment for Moll? What's the matter now?' he asked.

Moll laughed too. 'The jungle! surely some of it is all bright colours; I'm sure I have read of lovely flowering trees and bright-coloured birds, and monkeys and tigers—yes, why you have spoken of them in your letters, mother.'

‘So there are! Look at those pretty acacia trees, and that flame of the forest! Aren’t they bright enough for you?’ demanded her father.

The tree her father called acacia was a mass of beautiful crimson flowers like azaleas, and the flame of the forest had gorgeous orange-red flowers resembling rhododendrons.

Moll looked at them, and exclaimed with delight, ‘That’s what I thought the whole of the jungle was!’

‘I’m glad it is not; green is much more restful to look upon, and I don’t think you will find a more beautiful tree than a palm-tree anywhere,’ said her father as they entered an avenue of palm-trees with a hedge of red hibiscus on either side, and at the end of it the bungalow.

For once Moll was speechless as she looked at the wooden structure standing upon pillars, which raised it some fifteen feet off the ground, with an *atap* (palm-leaf) roof, the wooden steps to which she slowly ascended, and then stood at the top of them and looked round in astonishment.

‘Well, Moll, what’s the matter again?’ demanded her father, a little crossly this time.

‘Nothing—it’s lovely; but what a funny house! Where’s the beginning?’ she asked.

‘Moll’s nothing if not original.—Where do houses generally begin, Moll?’ demanded her

father, throwing himself into a chair on the veranda, amused and pleased at Moll's evident admiration of the prettily furnished veranda, which Mrs Meredyth used as her drawing-room or sitting-room.

'English houses begin with a front-door,' promptly declared Moll. 'Where's the front-door? Where's—anything?' she demanded, looking round.

They all laughed.

'There are no doors here, Moll,' said her mother.

'Then what do visitors do? Don't they ring or knock, or—or anything?' she asked.

'No, they walk on to the veranda,' they explained.

'But the whole house is a veranda,' protested Moll.

This was not quite true, but the veranda drawing-room and dining-room certainly were all one—a vast kind of double room, having only an *atap* or palm-leaf roof to cover them in. The veranda was rather like a short T, shaping out into a huge bow (without the window) at the top of the T for the drawing-room, the stalk of the T being the dining-room; to the bedrooms a frieze of lattice-work let in air.

'But, mother, are the natives so honest that you can leave all these silver ornaments and pretty things out in the open air like this?'

demande^d Moll, to whom an unguarded veranda-room was a new idea.

'They are by no means honest; but we are generally near, and should hear them if they came up on the veranda.'

'You weren't near last night, for you were at Singapore. Do you think they have stolen anything?' inquired Moll.

'Moll evidently thinks us very careless, my dear. She would not think of leaving her belongings lying about on a veranda,' said her father, much amused at Moll's amazement at a planter's bungalow.

'No, indeed, I would not. I expect when you come to count them you will find some of your silver photo-frames or something gone,' declared Moll.

'I don't think we shall; the servants will have taken good care of that. They know if anything is missing they will have their wages cut for it,' explained Mr Meredyth.

Moll made no comment upon this, and suddenly exclaimed, 'Why, there are no windows! Don't you even have windows to your houses here? Well, this really is the most extraordinary house I ever was in—no doors, no windows, no walls, no bells, no chimneys, no knockers. Oh it is funny! and the funniest thing of all is that it is prettier than an English house.'

‘I hope you are not going to describe our bungalow like that when you go home, Moll, or people will think we live like savages,’ objected Mrs Meredyth, smiling all the same at Moll’s vehemence, such energy even in speech being unusual over trifles.

‘Oh I shall say it is all very pretty; but, mother, how would you say it? There are no windows or doors—not proper ones, I mean—are there?’ persisted Moll.

‘Moll means that we have no glass in the windows.—But if you think a little you will agree that one is better without glass in this hot, sunny climate, Moll,’ said her father.

‘Come and take off your hat, and get into a cool morning-gown, dear,’ said Mrs Meredyth.

Mr Meredyth said something to his wife as she opened the door into Moll’s bedroom, at which she smiled, and both he and Kenneth laughed.

‘To tell the truth, that gave me rather a shock when I first saw it,’ the latter observed.

‘What gave you a shock, Ken? What are you two laughing at?’ demanded Moll as she stood at the wooden door of her bedroom, which she had declined to call a door because there was no door-handle or ‘anything,’ as she said, and it was ‘only a plank opening into the room, for all the world like our henhouse door at school, only even that has a kind of handle.’

‘You wait and see,’ said her father.

‘Anything more funny? On the contrary, this is a very nice big room, rather like an ordinary bedroom, except that the bed is *rather* big. Is this my room?’ she asked, her quick eyes taking in everything as they roved round the wooden boarding, which Moll did not recognise as walls.

‘Yes, dear, this is your room. What made you ask? Is there anything wrong?’

‘Oh no, it is very nice. It was only that the bed was not made; and, after all, it is rather fun having square holes in the walls for windows. But what do you do if it rains?’

‘There are wooden shutters. But the bed is made. That is all you have, a sheet on the top of a mattress and two pillows and a bolster,’ explained her mother.

‘I see; that was what father and Ken were laughing at, I suppose; but he hasn’t put the bolster under the pillows, and it isn’t the right size or shape,’ observed Moll, going, in her energetic way, to make the bed properly, as she thought, and making up her mind to help her mother, who evidently had only natives who knew nothing, or at any rate not how to make a bed.

‘That bolster is to put your feet on, Moll; they call it a “Dutch granny,” said Mrs Meredyth.

Moll stopped her bed-making operations, and stared with open eyes at her mother. 'Put my feet on a bolster, instead of my head? I'd rather not! Why should I? What is the sense of that?' she asked, pouring out the questions so quickly that her mother, who was not a talker, had no time to get a word in.

When Moll stopped for breath, she said in her quiet way, 'There is no need for you to use it at all if you do not wish; you have pillows to put your head upon, and it cools one to lift one's feet off the bed. However, you can try the bolster, and if you do not like it you need not use it; but really, if such a little thing as that surprises you, I don't know what you will say to the bathroom.'

Mrs Meredyth opened the door at the other side of the room. Fortunately this door was not very wide, or probably Moll, in her head-long way, would have fallen down the wooden ladder leading to the bathroom, a square, stone-paved room, with a large earthenware vase or pot full of water in one corner, and a little tin pail, with a bar of tin across it, called a dipper.

'Oh dear, I beg your pardon, mother! I know I shall break my neck one of these days,' said Moll, who had caught at her mother to save herself.

'You will learn one thing out here, and that is to move in a more leisurely manner, or you

will make yourself in a dreadful state of heat. What do you think of your bathroom? At any rate, we each have a bathroom to ourselves out here, and that is a luxury every one cannot afford at home,' was Mrs Meredyth's reply.

'Is this my bathroom? Where is the bath?' said Moll, who had jumped down the ladder and was staring about for a bath.

Mrs Meredyth smiled. 'There is your bath, that big jar in the corner. You use that tin dipper to throw water all over yourself, and you have no idea how refreshing it is.'

Moll gave peals of laughter, at which her father on the veranda remarked, 'I expect that's our Eastern bathroom; I guessed it would surprise her.'

'Oh mother, this the most delightful thing of all! I am dreadfully hot, couldn't I have a bath now, the water looks so lovely and green and cool?'

Mrs Meredyth looked doubtfully at the cool green water. 'I am not quite sure that it is clean; that is the worst of this country, one can never trust the servants to do their work.'

'But that does not matter; it is from the stream we crossed coming up the drive, I suppose, so it will be like bathing in the river. 'Oh look! two dear little fish!'

'The *tukang ayer** must empty it out; he

* Water-carrier.

really is too careless,' exclaimed Mrs Meredyth, who was not as delighted at sight of the little fish swimming about the jar as Moll was.

'No, don't call the *tukang*—whatever he is. I'll fish for them,' suggested Moll.

'You will evidently not be dull here,' said her mother, smiling; 'but we will find you better occupation than fishing in your bath. Now, if you mean to have a bath before tiffin you had better let me leave you, for I am going to have one myself, and I hear father splashing; he is having his, which means that he will be calling out for tiffin in another quarter of an hour, so you had better hurry,' said Mrs Meredyth as she left the bathroom.

She was just putting on a pretty wrapper after her bath, and feeling cool and fresh, when cries were heard from Moll's bathroom.

'For goodness' sake, go and see what mischief she has got into now!' called out Mr Meredyth, who was back again in khaki, his dark-cloth clothes being only donned for Singapore.

Mrs Meredith hurried to Moll, who greeted her with half-laughing complaints. 'I can't get out of the horrid thing,' she said.

Mrs Meredyth exclaimed at sight of Moll, who was crouched up somehow inside the vase, with only her head appearing. 'Oh dear,

Moll, what could you be thinking of to get into that thing?' she cried.

'What else is it for?' gasped Moll, struggling in vain to get out of the jar.

'To dip the water out of. Dear, dear! I am afraid I must break the jar. I thought it a pretty shape, and put it in your bathroom for that reason; they generally have wider tops,' said Mrs Meredyth.

'It would be a pity to break it; it is a pretty shape, like the jars in the pantomime "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves,"' said Moll, as she floundered about and splashed her mother with water.

'Keep still, Moll, I am going to get a hatchet,' declared her mother; and she presently returned with one, broke the jar, and liberated Moll, who stood enveloped in a bath-towel, and looking ruefully at the broken jar.

'Riddle: When is a bath not a bath? In the East, where it is a jar,' observed Moll.

'Just like you, Moll. I wonder what you will do next? Nobody but you would think of getting into a jar,' said her Cousin Kenneth when he heard the tale.

'If it hadn't been called a bathroom, and that jar a bath, I should not have thought of getting into it. But baths are for people to get into, aren't they?'

'Not in the East, and Moll is not the first

person to make that mistake or get stuck in her jar. I knew a man from England who did the very same thing,' said her father, who had laughed heartily over the story.

'Anyway, the jungle may be green; but I take back my words, father—it is not disappointing, after all, and I think life here is delightful,' declared Moll.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SINNA DURAI.

KENNETH MEREDYTH was putting on his hat as he made his last remark.

‘Where are you going, Ken?’ demanded Moll of her cousin.

‘Down to tiffin with the S. D.’s. I hope you will have no more surprises or shocks while you are here.’

‘Your hat has just given me one! Is that what you call a *topee*? Because it’s the very ugliest thing I have ever seen in the way of hats,’ she retorted.

‘Not half so bad as some of the things girls put on their heads; besides, we don’t go in for beauty here; we wear hats that are light and thick enough to keep off the sun,’ he replied, going off with his criticised khaki pith-hat.

‘Who are the “Esdys”? Are they our nearest neighbours?’ asked Moll.

‘S. D. stands for *sinna durai*, and in this case for my two assistant-planters. We must ask them up to dinner to make your acquaintance.—Eh, *mem-sahib*?’ * Mr Meredyth asked his wife.

‘Yes, by all means; they have a monotonous life here.—You must be nice and kind to them,

* Madam, lady.

Moll; there are so few *mems* about, so you must uphold the dignity of your sex,' said her mother.

'Yes, mind you behave your best, and put on a pretty frock; it does the boys good to put on company manners now and then, or they would turn into veritable savages,' observed Mr Meredyth, after he had shouted after Kenneth to invite the S. D.'s to come up that evening.

'Jolly good job you're back, Merry; we're awfully overdone and want a holiday,' said one of the other assistants, named Fish, a very cheery, boyish-looking young man.

'Holiday! you haven't been out two years yet. Fancy wanting a holiday already; yours isn't due for another eighteen months, Fish.—As for you, Waughope, you're only just come; surely you are not used up yet?' protested Kenneth Meredyth.

'We're not used up; we're fed up, old Merry—I beg your pardon, but your uncle is a bit of a slave-driver, you must own, and frowns on the mildest dissipation,' remarked Mr Fish.

Kenneth laughed. 'All the better for you, you can't spend money on the estate; but what good do you suppose my coming will do to you? I mean to grind away at planting, and make my pile, and go home and spend it,' he observed.

'Th-tha-that's what I say; sa-save up-p,

and get out of this beastly country as soon as possible,' put in Mr Waughope, who stammered slightly when speaking to any stranger or in moments of excitement.

'Waughope hates the place; he says planting rubber is a rotten occupation, and he never would have come out if he had known what a lot of insects there are here. But if you are coming back to grind at planting, as you call it, we shall be worse off than before. We have heard nothing but your praises since you went home, and I hoped distance lent enchantment to your virtues; but if you are going to act up to your high character, good-bye to hopes of holidays for us,' declared Mr Fish.

'Before I forget, I was told to invite you both up to dinner to-night,' said Kenneth, ignoring the chaff about his steadiness.

'Thanks awfully. I say, you've brought a young cousin out. I hear she's an awfully jolly girl,' said Mr Fish.

'She is only a child, but she is very lively and great at tennis, so we shall make a four-some now.'

'It will be a change to see a child here, and, upon my word, I'd rather have a young thing about the place than a fashionable young lady, giving herself airs like some of the Kuala ladies, who won't ever take the trouble to bow to you sometimes, and are as stiff as pokers.'

‘Moll isn’t stiff; she’s a trifle too lively, and if she were my daughter I would never have brought her out here. She’s bound to get into mischief; it’s not like England, where one has occupations indoors,’ said Kenneth Meredyth, looking serious.

‘Don’t worry, gran’pa; we’ll all keep her occupied with tennis, it’ll be a good excuse for playing. But, joking apart, I don’t see what you are afraid of; there’s nothing to fear on a rubber estate, unless she starts tapping the trees, and she can’t do much harm that way; besides, we’ll soon stop that.’

‘I don’t mean that; I don’t fancy tapping rubber-trees will appeal to Moll; but I have a feeling somehow that she will get bored and get into some mischief or other, and I wish you fellows would promise me to do elder-brother business and moderate her if you get a chance,’ Kenneth Meredyth wound up. He could not have told what made him appeal to these two young men to look after Moll, for, after all, their bungalow was a mile from the Meredyths’, and except at tennis and occasionally for the evening they did not come up to it, all business being transacted at the office.

Mr Fish, who was supposed to be rather a thoughtless young fellow, looked up at Kenneth. ‘I don’t know what mischief you imagine Miss Meredyth can get into, unless

she goes running into the jungle and gets chawed up by a tiger ; but I promise to look after her as if she were my own young sister, if I get a chance,' he said.

'And so will I, if I can be of any use,' added Mr Waughope ; and Kenneth Meredyth felt relieved, and a weight that he had hardly known was there was lifted off his mind.

'Looks as if young Miss Meredyth was a handful. I expect she's been reading tales of adventure, and is full of tiger-hunts and exploring the jungle, and Merry wants to be sure we sha'n't encourage her,' opined Mr Fish, after the senior assistant had left them.

'I thought the difficulty was to see tigers, not to avoid them ; but there's no fear of my leading her into such dangers ; I'm not afraid of tigers, but I am of snakes and panthers, and all the beastly reptiles this country swarms with, and so I shall tell Miss Meredyth if she asks me to make any explorations of that sort,' remarked Mr Waughope with decision and no stammering, for he was used to Mr Fish.

They were both good-hearted young Englishmen, and would not willingly have led or encouraged Moll in any pranks ; but it is possible if it had not been for Kenneth Meredyth's warning that Moll might have persuaded them to join her in her mischief. As it was, she managed not to be 'moderated'

by them on several occasions, or the tale of her doings on Bukit Ayer Rubber Estate would not perhaps have been told.

On this first evening, however, Moll was on her best behaviour, and the two young men were much taken by the bright 'little girl,' as they called her, who looked more like twelve years old than fourteen, and certainly not in the least like the sixteen years old that she liked to pretend to be.

'Don't you like insects? Not even these dear little lizards?' inquired Moll, looking with admiration at the numerous lizards of different sizes and colours which were running all over the roof and boarding of the dining-room.

Mr Waughope had been to college, and was a very studious youth, and he replied, 'They are not insects, but reptiles, Miss Meredyth; and I do not like them any more than I do insects,' and he shuddered.

Mrs Meredyth looked a little anxiously at Moll, for she knew her daughter was not fond of being corrected, and would probably tease the shy young man; but Moll answered, with apparent innocence, 'Aren't they? What is the difference between a reptile and an insect?'

'A reptile is a creature that crawls (from *reperere*—*reptilis*, to creep); whereas an insect is a small creature divided or cut into three parts (from *insecare*, to cut into),' explained

the young man. He had been meant for a schoolmaster, and only ill-health had sent him out to the Malay Peninsula to plant rubber.

Mr Meredyth and the others smiled at the young man's pedantry; but Moll looked quite grave and interested.

'Indeed, I never knew that. Then we all used to be reptiles? How interesting!' she exclaimed.

'W-we, Miss Meredyth? How do you make that out?' demanded the amazed young man.

'Moll has got the Darwin theory upside-down, I suppose,' laughed her father.

'No, I haven't; I'm not quite so ignorant as you all seem to think;' and if this was a sly hit at Mr Waughope he did not see it. 'I know Darwin said we used to be apes; but I didn't know we used to be reptiles till Mr Waughope told me.—You ought to publish a book about it, and call it the "Waughope Theory,"' she suggested.

'I don't understand,' said that youth stiffly, for he guessed that Moll was poking fun at him.

'You must not pay any attention to Mollie's nonsense, Mr Waughope. She is a silly child, and not Miss Meredyth yet,' said her mother, who was indeed a mother to the young men around, and a greater influence for good than she knew.

‘What do you mean, Moll?’ inquired her cousin.

‘How do you work out that theory?’ demanded Mr Fish.

‘First and foremost, do you say we never have been reptiles? Answer me that,’ demanded Moll.

‘Certainly not,’ they declared in concert.

‘If I prove to you that we were, according to Mr Waughope’s definition, what will you give me?’ she asked.

Mrs Meredyth sat and smiled at Moll, whose eager, animated face and original conversation made a pleasant diversion at the planter’s table, where conversation had a tendency, as was only natural, to run on rubber.

‘I’ll give you a box of chocolates,’ said Mr Fish promptly.

‘And I’ll give you a book on reptiles,’ observed Mr Waughope, with a smartness the others had not expected of him.

There was a roar of laughter at this.

‘And what will you give me, Ken?’ persisted Moll.

‘My *topee*,’ he retorted.

‘You’ll regret that offer in a minute, for I shall throw it into the fire,’ declared Moll.

‘Fire away, Moll. I don’t see what trick you are at now,’ said her father.

‘Were you ever babies?’ demanded Moll;

'and if so, were you small creatures that crawled (from *reperere*, to crawl)?' she wound up triumphantly.

'I hope that will cure you of being a prig, Waughope. You see where your inaccurate definitions have landed us. I shall get a sun-stroke to-morrow,' declared Kenneth when they had finished laughing.

'I am fairly caught, Miss Moll, and I think I owe you a book upon reptiles, where you will get more correct information.'

'Oh well, I shouldn't read it if you got me one, so I think I will let you off your debt; but I won't give up the *topee* and the chocolates,' said Moll.

'Indeed you will; I don't allow betting at my table,' declared her father; 'and you are not going to regulate the fashion here, so you need not think it, miss.'

Moll only laughed; she did not want any of her promised rewards, and was more surprised than pleased when she received later on a book on the fauna of the Malay Peninsula, a box of chocolates, and Kenneth's old *topee*, which he had replaced by another exactly like it; the three being made into a huge parcel, and addressed to Moll.

However, she opened the book to look at the pictures, and was so much interested in it that she not only read it through, but talked

about it to Mr Waughope, who, although he never got as far as touching insects or reptiles, was interested in them from an entomological point of view.

Just as the bets were being discussed, there was a diversion—a lizard fell plump upon Moll's plate and into her gravy, which it sent splashing over the table.

'Ugh, horrid thing!' cried Moll indignantly as the Chinese 'boy' came swiftly forward and took the plate away.

'Ha, ha! how about "dear little lizards"? I am afraid your affection is only skin-deep,' exclaimed her father.

'Lizard gravy is not appetising,' protested Moll; 'but they are dear little things all the same. Just look at this tiny creature; it is only about an inch long, and almost transparent; look what perfect little hands and feet it has,' she added, looking at another tinier lizard.

'I should not have called them hands and feet; but after the way you pull one up, Moll, I prefer not to say what I call them,' her cousin, who was sitting at the other side of her, observed.

There are often half-a-dozen lizards running about one's table; they swarm in the bungalows. The little lizard in question was running about the table near Moll's plate, and she was

amusing herself directing it by means of a knife to the other side, where Mr Waughope was seated.

Mrs Meredyth, who saw quite well what Moll was doing, frowned at her, and made signs to stop her, for she knew that Mr Waughope had a physical aversion to reptiles; but Moll did not heed her, if she saw her sign.

At last Mr Waughope could stand it no longer; the tiny lizard was just at the edge of his plate. With a shiver of disgust, he drew back his chair. 'I'm awfully sorry, Mrs Meredyth, but I can't bear the creatures.'

Mrs Meredyth had it removed, and looked gravely at Moll, who pretended to be very penitent.

'Naughty girl; she will lead that boy a dance, I expect, now that she has discovered his weakness,' said her mother afterwards.

'That will do him no harm; he ought to try and get over such folly,' said her husband.

And if he had but known it, this was just what the young man was saying to himself that night as he thought (with anger at himself) of his exhibition of sensitiveness at table.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MENAGERIE.

‘UP already, Moll? What are you going to do with yourself all day? You can’t do any lessons, and you can’t play games till about five o’clock; that means nearly twelve hours to be got through somehow,’ said Mr Meredyth as he met his daughter coming out of her room, dressed, before six o’clock in the morning of the next day.

‘I shall find plenty to do; the days are never long enough for me. For one thing, I am going to help mother about the house,’ replied Moll.

‘Are you? I don’t think that will last long; one’s energy soon oozes away in this climate. But remember one thing, you are not to go outside the bungalow during the daytime without leave. Do you understand?’ continued her father.

‘Yes, father; but I shall be sure to forget, and what am I to do when you and mother are out and I want to go into the garden for something, or to have a little walk?’ protested Moll, who, to do her justice, did obey her parents as a rule.

‘You are not to have little walks alone during the day, and your mother or I will

always be near. Anyway, I absolutely forbid you to go out in the sun, and the first time you disobey you go straight home with your mother.'

'I shall not disobey you, father,' said Moll, a little hurt at this threat, and she never did; but her father's insistence upon her staying in during the day and while the sun shone misled her, as will be seen.

'I'll tell you where you may go when you are tired of the bungalow, and that is under it. There is a regular menagerie down there—monkeys, orang-outangs, dogs, cats, and parrots, to say nothing of your friends the lizards and such-like insects,' laughed her father as he went off to make his round of the estate.

With a cry of delight, Moll jumped down the veranda steps, and there, under the bungalow, which, it will be remembered, was raised some fifteen feet above the ground on stone pillars, was a collection of animals, and among them two orang-outangs looking at her with the pathetic expression usual to these animals.

Moll sat down on a wooden box in front of them, and began peeling a banana which she had taken up to eat, breakfast not being ready for another hour. If she had thought a little she would have remembered that it was rather tantalising to eat a banana in front of a monkey.

However, she did not think, and even her strong nerve did not prevent her giving a shriek when a skinny brown hand clutched her shoulder from behind and another stretched over and snatched the banana out of her hands. She turned and saw a little brown monkey, which darted away.

Moll did not know what fear meant, especially with animals, of which she was very fond. She started up, exclaiming, 'You greedy thing, that's very bad manners! give it back at once, and another time wait until I give you anything,' and she tried to get the banana from the monkey.

But Bébé, as she was called, was by no means a well-trained animal, nor very good-tempered, and she clutched at the banana with both front paws and kicked at Moll with her hind paws.

At sound of the struggle, one of the house 'boys' (as they are called, whether young or old) came hurrying out, and, saying something in Malay to Moll, made violent signs to her to let go of the monkey's paw.

But though Moll understood the signs quite well she had no intention of attending to them.

'Are you talking Chinese to me?' she inquired of the man, who was talking rapidly to her.



Moll set her teeth, and tried to disentangle herself.

'Ya,' said the man, who did not understand her.

'Well I can't understand a word, so it's no good, and you had better be quiet; you are worse than the monkey.—Let go, you greedy wretch,' she continued to the monkey, who had got the banana to its mouth, and, resenting Moll's interference, had clutched her hair with its other paw.

Moll set her teeth, and tried to disentangle herself; but she was no match for Bébé, who pulled and pulled at her hair, chattering with delight at having pulled out a handful. The pain was intense, but Moll would rather have suffered agonies than call for help and be forbidden to come down to this delightful playground, and the Chinaman had run away apparently. Moll only hoped not to get help, for she meant to fight Bébé alone.

However, she had done him an injustice. He returned with a stick, at sight of which Bébé started off to her perch with the banana, from which coign of vantage she looked, as Moll chose to think, triumphantly down upon her.

'No you don't!' she cried, and taking the stick from the 'boy,' she threatened Bébé with it, and again tried to get the banana, now half-eaten, from her.

The Chinaman from behind was evidently

expostulating with much gesticulation at this rash behaviour; but Moll took no notice until she heard a voice near say in English, 'Good, g-gracious, Miss Moll, you are hurt! What have you done to your face?'

Moll made a final clutch, and got the remains of the banana from Bébé, and then looked up to see Mr Waughope standing looking horror-struck at her.

'Oh good-morning! What is the matter with my face?' She put up her hand, and, finding it covered with blood, said, smiling, 'That's nothing.'

'Nothing? But it is something! You must leave that monkey alone, horrid brute, and go in and bathe your face at once,' said the young assistant, speaking very decidedly, in spite of his slight stammer.

'Must I, indeed? You go and order about your own black slaves, and leave *me* alone,' retorted Moll.

'I beg your pardon, if I spoke rudely; but I meant that you must not leave a cut open like that in this country; an insect might get in and set up blood-poisoning, or goodness only knows what. This is an awful country, Miss Moll,' he wound up in tones of disgust.

Moll laughed. She gathered that the young assistant could not get accustomed to Malaya and its climate and insects. 'I'm not so afraid

of insects as you are, and I don't mean to let this beast get the better of me; I'm going to train her,' she declared.

But Mr Waughope was seriously concerned at Moll's appearance, which was worse than she had any idea of, and summoning up his courage he apologetically but firmly announced his intention of calling Mrs Meredyth to see to Moll's wounds, as he persisted in calling them.

'Tell-tale tit!' said Moll scornfully, as she went off, taking the precaution of going through her bathroom, which had a door opening on to the garden, like all Eastern bathrooms; and when she looked in the glass she congratulated herself on having gained her room without being seen, for Bébé had torn her hair so unmercifully that the blood had poured down the side of her face, and she did not wonder at Mr Waughope's horror, for she was obliged to own that she did look a terrible spectacle.

However, her face was not hurt, and by dint of bathing and smoothing back her hair she managed to hide all traces of her fight with the monkey. When she went on to the veranda she found Mr Waughope there, having come to look for some paper which Mr Meredyth had left behind, and could not trust a messenger to find. Moll expected him to be crushed by her last remark; but she did not

know Alan Waughope, whom indeed it took some time to know.

He looked up from his search, and seemed relieved at her improved appearance. 'That's better; but have you put some antiseptic on the wound?' he asked.

'Dear me, what an old granny you are! There isn't any wound to speak of,' cried Moll.

'There must have been for it to bleed like that. If you haven't put anything on, here is some,' he announced calmly, fetching a bottle from some back premises.

Moll looked at him for a moment in silence. She would like to have refused to use the lotion, and to tell him once for all to mind his own business; but she felt pretty sure that if she did he would just go off to her mother and beg her to make her (Moll) bathe her 'wound' with this stuff.

'I never in all my life met such an obstinate boy—never!' she said, taking the bottle from him and walking off with it.

Mr Waughope stood and looked after her with a quiet and placid smile, not the least offended by the epithet 'boy' which Moll had hurled at him.

Not for worlds would Moll have owned that her head was aching, nor that the lotion was both cooling and soothing; but so it was, as Mr Waughope knew when he recommended it.

With great tact, he made no inquiries about her wound when he next saw Moll, though, as it happened, it was in the menagerie, as Moll called the space under the bungalow.

Hearing voices under her, Moll went down to watch the pair of orang-outangs, whose behaviour interested and amused her, and there she found, to her surprise, Mr Wauchope bending over them with a concerned air.

‘What is the matter?’ she asked.

‘This poor animal is ill and evidently in pain, and the “boy” says it won’t eat,’ he remarked, straightening himself and looking relieved at Moll’s advent, his kind heart bidding him relieve the orang-outang if he could—he was the amateur doctor of the estate—while his natural repugnance to touching the animal prevented his coming near enough to find out what was the matter with it.

‘Let me see. I’m not afraid of it,’ said Moll.

Mr Wauchope took no notice of this insult.

‘I fancy it has got a chill,’ he remarked.

‘I’ll try it with a piece of banana,’ said Moll; and, fetching one, she kept it hidden from Bébé, and put it to the orang-outang’s mouth.

The poor thing put out its paw and put her hand gently away. ‘It’s just like a human being!’ cried Moll.

‘Yes, repulsively so,’ observed Mr Wauchope;

but added kindly, 'He might take a little milk,' and gave the order for it to be brought.

Already every coolie on the estate called the young assistant Tuan Dûkum, or Mr Doctor, for he was very fond of doctoring them, and very clever at finding out what was the matter and giving them the right remedies; but, as will have been seen, he had an aversion to animals, and only common humanity prevented his leaving the orang-outang alone.

'Will you try and feed it?' he inquired of Moll, handing her the tin of milk.

'Hadn't we better give him fresh milk? This can't have much nourishment in it,' objected Moll.

'I am afraid this is the best you will get,' said Mr Waughope.

'Is it? We'll see about that,' said Moll, going off.

Mr Waughope began to stammer out an explanation; but he did not speak quickly, and Moll, who thought he was dictating to her as usual, did not stop to listen.

In a couple of minutes she came back, looking rather crestfallen. 'Why couldn't you say there is nothing but tinned milk in this country?' she asked.

'I thought I did say so,' he remarked.

'No, you did not; you said it was all I should get.'

Mr Waughope made no reply, and Moll tried in vain to get the orang-outang to take a little milk. 'You must get his wife away; the greedy thing is pretending to be affectionate, and she is just drinking the milk out of the spoon herself,' she said.

She knew quite well that the young man had a physical aversion to touching any animal, and said it out of sheer mischief. But she was not to get the better of him. He fetched a banana from the string where they hung to ripen, and lured Chiplis, the female orang-outang, away.

Moll's mouth twitched with amusement in spite of being outwitted, and to her joy she got the sick orang-outang to take a few spoonfuls.

'Hallo, Moll, doctoring poor old Rufus? I am afraid he is in a bad way.—Well, Rufus, old man, how are you—pretty seedy, eh?—Oh there you are, Waughope. I thought you hated animals, and wouldn't even have a dog?'

'I don't care about them, but I can't see them suffer,' he remarked.

'Well, come and have *makan** with us; you deserve some food after your exertions with old Rufus.—Eh, Moll?' said her father.

'I wish you wouldn't mix up Tamil and Malay and English, father; I never understand

* Food.

half that you are saying—all of you,' complained Moll.

'That's just what I found when I first came out, but I am sorry to say I have fallen into the same habit. You will soon do so too,' said Mr Waughope.

'I shall not,' declared Moll, leaving her ministrations to the orang-outang and going in to breakfast.

'Moll's looking pale already,' Mr Meredyth remarked to his wife across the breakfast-table.

'Don't you feel well, dear?' said her mother, who had noticed that she was not eating much.

Mr Waughope kept a discreet silence, for which Moll forgave him much. 'I'm all right; I have a little headache, that's all,' she observed.

'You are tired after yesterday; you must lie down after breakfast,' said Mrs Meredyth.

To her parents' surprise—for Moll used not to like being 'mollycoddled'—she agreed submissively.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE TRACK OF THE PANTHER.

PERHAPS if Mr Waughope had known how Moll's pale face and subdued air worried her mother he might have enlightened her as to their cause; but as it was, he held his peace, and poor Mrs Meredyth, fearing that the climate was already having a disastrous effect upon her daughter, spent a most unhappy morning.

'Where's Moll?' demanded Mr Meredyth, when, cheery in spite of the heat and the tiring morning, he came in for eleven o'clock tiffin.

'Lying down, I think; she seems poorly. I do hope I have done right in bringing her out here,' said his wife, her brows puckered with anxiety.

'Right? Of course we have. Why, the house is twice as bright already; it's doing us all good. I never saw Waughope look as alive as he did this morning. She is such a cheery little thing, with no nonsense about her, in spite of her pranks,' declared Mr Meredyth.

'She did not look very cheery this morning, and it is not like her to sleep quietly all the morning like this,' objected Mrs Meredyth.

'Is she asleep all this time?' inquired Mr Meredyth.

‘She was an hour or so ago when I went in to look at her, and as she is quiet, I suppose she is asleep still, and I don’t like to disturb her.’

Mr Meredyth himself looked concerned at this news. ‘She can’t be well if she sleeps like that; you’d better rouse her. Go and ask her how she feels, and if she is at all feverish we will send for the doctor at once; it’s always best to take these things in time,’ he said, working himself up into a state of excitement, as was his habit.

Mrs Meredyth opened the door of Moll’s bedroom gently, and gave an exclamation of surprise.

‘What is it?’ cried her husband.

‘Why, Eustace, she is not here!’ she cried.

‘The naughty girl; she has gone out, in spite of my express command to the contrary. Well, she must go home again, and you must go with her; this is no place for a disobedient child. She will be off into the jungle, or goodness only knows where, getting sunstroke,’ said Mr Meredyth angrily, and turned on his heel.

Mrs Meredyth followed him on to the veranda, where he threw himself into a long chair and called for a cooling drink. ‘Where do you think she has gone, Eustace?’ she inquired.

‘Goodness knows; into the jungle, I suppose—that’s what people out from England are

always wild to explore; goodness knows why, or what they expect to see there, unless it is tigers, which they would be afraid of if they met them.'

Mrs Meredyth, with troubled eyes, looked over the valley at the jungle, which at one point came within half a mile of their bungalow. 'Surely she would not dare to go there by herself? Not that there are any tigers in that jungle, are there?'

'No such luck, or I would have a tiger-hunt, and if there were, you know quite well they'd keep out of Moll's way; tigers are just the beasts people need not be afraid of. But there's a panther there!' he added, sitting up suddenly as he remembered this fact.

'A panther! How do you know? Has it been seen?' cried Mrs Meredyth in alarm.

'No, but its footprints have been seen outside the bungalow!' he exclaimed, putting on his hat and running down the steps, evidently on his way to the jungle to look for Moll, without even taking his drink of cocoanut milk.

'Eustace—wait; let us think a little what is best to be done. If the child has really gone to the jungle, the *kaboons** or some of the *boolies*† will have seen her; we had better question them.'

* *Kaboon*, gardener.

† *Coolie*, labourer.

Mr Meredyth, evidently impatient to be off, would scarcely stop to make inquiries; but fortunately Kenneth Meredyth arrived at this moment.

He listened to the story in his quiet way, and then said, 'I can scarcely believe she has gone to the jungle.'

'Believe it or not, that's where she is, and we must follow her before she gets too far,' said his uncle.

'If she is not there, Kenneth, where can she be? I have looked in her room, and the bed is empty; there is nowhere else for her to be,' Mrs Meredyth said.

'You have looked under the bungalow of course?' he asked, for Mr Waughope had told him of Moll's interest in the menagerie kept there.

'Yes, of course. Here, don't waste time talking, Ken, but get your rifle and come along with me,' said Mr Meredyth testily.

Mrs Meredyth called to the *kaboons*, who said they had not noticed Moll; but they had been away for half-an-hour for *makan*, so they could not be certain that she had not gone.

Mrs Meredyth grew white as it began to be more likely that Moll really had gone to the jungle, and putting on her hat she took her sunshade and prepared to go with her husband and nephew.

‘My dear, you must not come. What could you do? Besides, you know you get fever if you go out in the sun,’ expostulated her husband.

Kenneth seconded his entreaties. ‘Uncle and I will bring her back all right if she is there; but I feel pretty certain that she is not,’ he affirmed.

Mr Meredyth, senior, turned on him irritably. ‘How can you be certain? And if you are so certain, where do you suppose she is? She can’t have vanished into the air, or made herself invisible, can she?’

‘I fancy she must be in the bungalow’—— he was beginning.

But his uncle interrupted him. ‘Well, here is the bungalow,’ and he waved his stick about the veranda, ‘and she’s not there, as you see; nor is she in her own bedroom nor ours, and I don’t suppose she is hiding in yours,’ said his uncle.

‘No, she is not, for I have been in there unpacking Ken’s things; and I really think we had better start, for I do not like to think of Moll in the jungle alone. I shall not be in the sun, and’——here Mrs Meredyth’s voice trembled in spite of her efforts at self-command——‘and if there is any chance of her meeting a panther I must go.’

Even Kenneth grew a little pale under his

tan, for he too had been shown the footprints of the panther, and had heard how a neighbouring planter's dog had been seized by it off the veranda steps, not six yards from where his master had been peacefully sleeping.* The thought of Moll—bright, mischievous Moll, whom one could not help liking in spite of her pranks—in the clutches of a panther was terrible.

Tiffin was forgotten, and without waiting for a lemon-squash, though he too had come in after a long tramp in the hot sun over the rubber estate, Kenneth accompanied his uncle and aunt out across the garden and the coconut plantation and into the jungle.

On the way, Mr Meredyth dropped a little behind his wife, and made a sign in silence to Kenneth to drop behind too, and pointed to the ground.

Kenneth followed the direction of his uncle's stick, and set his mouth, for there were the footprints, recent footprints, of the panther just where they were going; so he had been prowling round the bungalow during the preceding night, and had made these tracks back into the jungle, just the way Moll would be pretty sure to go (though, if she had gone at all, her footprints had been obliterated by those of the

* This, as are other such statements in this story, is a fact; and, indeed, the whole is a tale of happenings in the Malay Peninsula.

coolies), for this was a shady path leading to the jungle from the bungalow.

Both instinctively looked towards Mrs Meredyth, but she was apparently walking on in blissful ignorance of these significant marks which made the two men with her grasp their rifles more firmly and clench their teeth as unbidden visions of what might have happened would rise.

This was a bit of virgin jungle through which a path had been cut to a very pretty little stream, where the planters used occasionally to go and fish, and never had it been trodden with such indifference to its beauty, for, in spite of Moll's assertion that it was green just like an English forest, it had its own beauty—tall trees, up the trunks of which grew lovely ferns, and orchids and other graceful parasites, to say nothing of fern-trees and palms of all kinds. But for all the notice taken of it, it might have been a monotonous rubber plantation, of which the rural look is spoilt by the little tin or glass cups attached to each tree, that is itself disfigured by the scoring for 'tapping' the rubber.

Silently, and in single file like the natives, the three anxious Europeans walked along the jungle path. First came Mr Meredyth, senior, so that he might see any danger ahead or under-foot in the shape of snakes; next came Mrs

Meredyth ; and last of all, to protect her from attack in the rear, walked Kenneth, his rifle ready to fire at a moment's notice. Of all the three he was the most alert, for he was not only a sportsman by nature, but young and just out from home, and had not fallen into the inert state that is the result of a long stay in the tropics.

Every sound in the jungle made Mrs Meredyth look anxiously in that direction, only to see a monkey scuttling away, chattering with indignation at being disturbed by these intruders, or a squirrel or some wild bird, whose rustling through the undergrowth seemed to their overstrained ears to be much louder than it really was.

Suddenly Mr Meredyth stopped short, and, stooping down, looked closely at the ground, which at this spot became soft and wet, showing clearly the footprints even of small animals which had passed over it.

'What is it, Eustace ?' cried his wife, bending over him to see what was attracting his attention.

It was the first word that had been spoken since they entered the jungle, and Mr Meredyth started involuntarily.

'The panther has not passed along here, so it must have turned off somewhere before it got here,' he said in a tone of relief as he

raised himself, and was just going to walk on again.

Kenneth examined the path in his turn, and then said, 'Wait a bit, uncle. There are no human footsteps here either,' and he seemed relieved too.

But Mr Meredyth gave a smothered cry. He had got it into his mind that Moll had fallen a prey to the panther, and the thought that she had *not* passed this way (now that the panther had not) was not consoling to him as it seemed to be to Kenneth. Of course it was possible that the beast, scenting her afar off, might track and meet her farther on; but there was also the hope that he had not done so yet, and that they might come up to Moll before she was hurt.

'Where can she be, then?' cried Mrs Meredyth.

Kenneth was on the point of repeating, 'In the bungalow,' but refrained, though he was of the same opinion as he had been all along, that, though it seemed impossible, she had hidden somewhere in the bungalow out of mischief.

Mr Meredyth rested the butt of his gun on the ground, and turned to Kenneth. 'She can't surely have left the path?' he said.

'No, there has been no opening wide enough for her to get through; I have looked carefully,' declared Kenneth.

'She is very small, Ken,' said Mrs Meredyth, her voice trembling.

'Not small enough to creep through that undergrowth, Aunt Eulalie. I don't think she can possibly have come this way; but if you want to be sure, let us all shout together.'

In a moment the forest resounded with cries of 'Moll! Moll! Moll-ie! Mollie!' only to be answered by silence, which was suddenly broken by faint shouts in the distance.

The three listened, holding their breath to hear more distinctly. At first they thought it might be some coolies shouting or quarrelling together, whose voices had penetrated thus far; but presently the sounds seemed to come nearer, and they heard 'Meredyth!' distinctly in English.

'Hallo!' they shouted again and again.

'Meredyth! Meredyth! Stop!' came in the voices of Waughope and Fish.

Mrs Meredyth drew a sharp breath. They were evidently bringing news of the lost child; but what kind of news?

As the sounds came from the entrance to the forest, they hastily retraced their steps, shouting, 'What's the news?'

But another five minutes passed before they could understand the breathless shouts of the two young assistants.

At last Kenneth's young ears caught the

words. 'It's all right; she's safe!' he cried with such relief that his aunt felt touched.

'Where is she?' bawled Mr Meredyth.

'At home—in the bungalow!' came the answer.

Mr Meredyth sat down on the stump of a tree and wiped his brow. 'In the bungalow!' he muttered. 'Well!'

The tears came into Mrs Meredyth's eyes. 'Thank God!' she said softly.

'Where on earth was she? You said you had looked thoroughly,' said her husband irritably, his anxiety turning into anger.

'I don't know, dear; but if you are rested let us go back. You must be starving,' she replied.

'I'm dying of thirst.—I suppose you couldn't knock down a cocoa-nut, Ken? I can't walk another mile without a drink,' he declared.

'I'll shoot one if you will stand out of the way,' remarked Ken, and he did so, and down tumbled three cocoa-nuts, which he fetched, broke open, and handed round.

They were sitting on the log drinking cocoa-nut milk when the two *sinna durais*, as they were always called, came in sight.

'Hold hard; keep a drop for us, Meredyth!' shouted Mr Fish.

'Shoot down some more, Ken. I want all mine,' declared his uncle.

‘You deserve a drink for bringing us news of Moll’s safety,’ said Mrs Meredyth, smiling kindly at the heated young men.

‘Yes, indeed! Where was she? I shall have to ask for an extra *sinna durai* to look after her, by the look of things, or this plantation will go to pot,’ announced Mr Meredyth, whose spirits were up again.

And where was Moll?

CHAPTER IX.

A HORRIBLE RUMOUR.

THE two *sinna durai*—no one ever called them anything else—were going to their bungalow for tiffin when they heard a great shouting and chattering behind them. This was a common state of affairs, for two or three natives talking peaceably together made as much noise as if they were having a serious quarrel.

Consequently the two young men took no notice, not even turning their heads, until it became much louder, and cries of '*Tuan! tuan!*' ('sir! sir!') were distinctly heard.

'Bother those coolies. I suppose there's a row on at the "Lines;"* but I'm going to have my lunch first if they kill each other,' said Mr Fish, walking on and mopping his face.

Mr Waughope, who was a new-comer, was scandalised at this apparent callousness. 'But if there is a row on at the coolie "Lines" I thought it was our duty to go and stop it.'

'Yes, if it is serious; but if we were to go every time those wretched coolies quarrelled over a little rice, or something equally trivial, we should have no peace or quiet at all, so

* The 'Lines,' buildings where the coolies lived—most of them labourers imported from India or China.

I have given orders that they are not to call me for anything less than murder, or I'll beat them,' announced Mr Fish coolly.

Mr Fish rather enjoyed shocking Mr Waughope, who took things in this country too seriously, and he smiled under his moustache at the young man's horrified face.

'Then it must be murder that's the matter now, for they are calling "*Tuan!*"' declared Mr Waughope; and, stopping short, he turned round. 'Yes, there is something very much the matter; three men are running after us,' he added in excitement.

'Let them run; it will work off their feelings in this heat. I'm not going to be bothered with coolies and their troubles till I've had *makan*. I'm starving. Come on, Waughope. Why, bless my heart, man, when you've been here a couple of years you'll know better than to pay any attention to these beggars and their excitements,' retorted Mr Fish.

'I don't know what I may do when I've been here two years, but I do know what I am going to do now, and that is to wait and see what is the matter;' and he stood still under the blazing sun, as only an Englishman does in the tropics, and waited for the excited coolies to come up.

'You won't be any the wiser if you do stop,

for you don't understand what they say,' was Mr Fish's parting shot as he walked on.

Mr Waughope took no notice of this taunt. As a matter of fact, he did not understand much Malay; but he meant to try, and he stood and waited alone for the three excited coolies.

But, alas! the men spoke quickly in their great excitement, and Mr Waughope could make nothing of their tale until the reiteration of the words 'young *mem*,' 'jungle,' and 'panther' struck his ear. Slowly and laboriously he tried to make himself understood, and as something like the truth dawned upon him, he in his turn shouted in horrified accents to the retreating figure of his fellow-assistant.

At first Mr Fish took no notice, but stolidly continued his way home to his much-needed *makan*; but cries of 'Fish, for heaven's sake, some awful catastrophe has happened!'

Mr Waughope, it will be remembered, generally stammered, and it might be expected that in moments of excitement he would stammer worse than usual; but, on the contrary, his voice sounded clear and his words distinct, and they reached Mr Fish, who did at last deign to stop and be interested.

'What is the matter?' he bawled impatiently.

'Moll Meredyth has been eaten by a panther!'

‘What!’ thundered Mr Fish, and without waiting for any further explanations he came running towards the group. His indifference had disappeared, and hunger, thirst, and heat were all forgotten as he gasped, ‘What, Moll Meredyth — taken — by a panther? When? Where?’

‘I don’t know. Ask these men,’ said Mr Waughope, looking white.

The men, with many gesticulations, repeated their tale. ‘*Mem* gone jungle; panther followed; clutched her—so,’ and they gave a graphic pantomimic description of the dreadful event.

Mr Fish ground his teeth. ‘Where is the *tuan bezar*?* Does he know, and the *mem*?’

‘Yes, *tuan*, and they have gone armed with guns into the jungle to kill the brute and bring back the remains of the little *mem*.’

While they were speaking, they were walking as rapidly as they dared, for they began to feel the heat now, towards Mr Meredyth’s bungalow.

‘We’d better follow them,’ Mr Fish said at last, in a subdued tone to his companion.

‘Yes,’ agreed the other, and they walked in dead silence and with such solemn faces that the coolies did not dare to open their mouths or speak any more about this exciting event,

* Big master.

at which they felt no sorrow and very little horror. In fact, if they had any feelings on the subject it probably was relief that at least it would mean the death of this particular beast which had been prowling about their neighbourhood.

Now the shouting of the men, added to those of Mr Waughope and Mr Fish, had been heard at the bungalow, and as they came within sight of it they saw a girl's form on the back veranda, and heard a cheery young voice saying, 'Is there anything the matter?'

Mr Fish muttered something under his breath, and Mr Waughope, after a gasp, stood and gazed open-mouthed at Moll Meredyth.

'You, Miss Moll! But—what's this tale I hear about you?' Mr Fish asked when they got up to the bungalow.

'I'm all right now; it was only a slight wound on my head.—Fancy you repeating that, Mr Waughope!' cried Moll in a tone of reproach.

The young men, both of whom had been more upset than they cared to own, sat down on the veranda to recover themselves.

'I don't think a wound from a panther is generally slight; you are to be congratulated, Miss Moll,' said Mr Fish gravely.

'A panther? Do you call that animal a panther?' she cried in surprise.

‘That’s what it is generally called,’ he retorted.

‘You don’t say so! What a funny thing!’ observed Moll.

‘I don’t see much funniness about it; you might have been torn to death by the brute,’ said Mr Waughope.

‘Then why on earth do they keep such a savage monkey under the veranda?’ asked Moll.

Both the young men stared at Moll. ‘What are you talking about?’ they inquired.

‘About the monkey that tore out my hair this morning, of course,’ said Moll.

‘Monkey?’ they echoed.

‘Yes, monkey. What are you two talking about?’ she retorted.

‘About the panther that is supposed to have killed you,’ said Mr Fish, who was beginning to suspect that there had been a mistake somewhere.

‘I don’t know anything about any panther except the monkey which you call a panther,’ declared Moll.

‘Then what on earth did these coolies mean by their cock-and-bull tale about a panther that had killed you, and—— Where are Mr and Mrs Meredyth?’ inquired Mr Fish suddenly.

‘I have no idea; they are not in the bungalow. I heard father’s voice about half-

an-hour ago, and I am not allowed to go into the grounds to look for them,' explained Moll.

'Where are those coolies?' cried Mr Fish angrily, and he went off to interview them and ask them what they meant by telling him such falsehoods.

They had an animated discussion in Malay, at the end of which Mr Fish came back to Moll, and said, 'There seems to have been some false alarm about a panther having eaten you, and these men say your parents have gone into the jungle to kill it and find you.'

Moll gave a peal of laughter. 'What nonsense! How could they think such a thing when I was in the bungalow all the time?' she cried.

'Nonsense or not, your father and cousin have gone off with their guns, and I think we'd better follow and tell them that you are safe,' said Mr Waughope.

'But it is lunch-time; they can't have gone out after panthers at this hour, and I think they might have taken me. I should like to be at a panther-shoot,' said Moll.

'They imagined you were there—very much there,' said Mr Fish with grim emphasis.

'Well, tell them to make haste back to *makan*, as I am hungry. I wish I could come with you, but I mayn't,' she called after them.

About an hour afterwards the whole party

arrived, looking very hot, tired, hungry, and, it must be added, not a little cross.

‘Where on earth have you been, Moll?’ said her father, when at last they came up on to the veranda and threw themselves on long chairs.

‘Me? At home. Where else should I be?’ asked Moll.

Mr Meredyth’s spirits, which were as buoyant as a young man’s, rose at sight of his daughter safe and sound, and he was inclined to see the ludicrous side of the affair, now that he was comfortably at home drinking his favourite iced cocoa-nut milk and ‘within hail,’ as he put it, of *makan*.

‘If you were always where you should be, which you are not, or your teachers malign you, we should not have expected you to be in the jungle or in the clutches of a panther.’

It took some time to make Moll understand that she really had been thought to be killed by a panther. When she found that they thought she had gone for a walk in the jungle she was much aggrieved. ‘But, father, you forbade me to go out of the bungalow,’ she protested.

‘Ah Moll, do you always do what you are told?’ asked her father.

‘I don’t know that I do, but I shouldn’t disobey you the very first day, anyhow, and I wouldn’t disobey you at all if I remembered,’ said Moll; whereupon they all laughed.

‘And now, thank goodness, we can have *makan*. Boys, you must stop here. Whew! I don’t know when I’ve had such an exciting morning.—It may not be your fault, Moll, but you’ve given everybody a fair amount of trouble on your first day. I hope it is not a sample of what your stay is going to be,’ said her father.

‘What I don’t understand is what made you think I was taken by a panther. Who told you so?’ inquired Moll, when they were all sitting down to *makan*.

‘Upon my word, I really don’t know how we did think so, now that I come to think of it, except that we could not think of any other place for you to have gone but into the jungle, and as a panther had just gone that same way there was a strong presumption that you two had met.’

‘Oh Eustace, don’t speak of it!’ cried his wife, shuddering.

Moll looked at her mother, and with great tact changed the conversation. ‘Yes, but why did you make up your mind that I had gone out of the bungalow?’ she asked.

‘Because we couldn’t find you in it; and that reminds me, Moll, where were you? You certainly were not on the veranda nor in your bedroom, nor were you with your friends the monkeys. Come, what hiding-place have you found for yourself?’ cried Mr Meredyth.

‘I haven’t found any hiding-place, and I haven’t been anywhere but in my room,’ cried Moll, looking puzzled.

‘But I looked there,’ said her mother.

‘Yes, I was not asleep; I was only tired, and my head ached. I heard you come in,’ said Moll. ‘Oh now I know; you must have come in while I was fishing,’ she added suddenly, grasping the situation.

Everybody stared in amazement at Moll

‘Fishing?’ they repeated vaguely.

‘Yes, and I caught six little fish, such dear little fish! I caught them with a bent pin and a little piece of bread, and the fish came and ate it quite eagerly, and didn’t seem to mind, and of course I told the *tukang ayer*—you see I am beginning to talk Malay quite well—I told him to put them back in the stream again.’

‘That accounts for it, fishing in her bath. She tried to get into it, and had to be cut out!’ cried her father. ‘I wonder to what use she will put her bath next!’

‘Oh I shall get used to it in time, I expect, but it is rather a funny sort of bath, you must own,’ observed Moll.

‘And I suppose we shall get used to you in time, but at present we don’t seem to be used to you.’

CHAPTER X.

MOLL LEARNS ABOUT RUBBER.

‘FATHER!’ shouted Moll after Mr Meredyth one morning when he was just starting off on his walk over the estate.

Life had been passing very quietly since Moll’s first day, for the excitements of which it must be owned she had not been to blame, and his fellow-assistants demanded of Kenneth Meredyth what he had meant by maligning his young cousin, who was lively, but by no means the handful he had declared her to be.

‘She is new yet, and the strangeness of the life is enough to occupy her attention at present; but you wait till it begins to pall upon her and she begins to want amusement, and see if she does not lead us all a life,’ Ken had replied.

‘I can’t imagine why you are so hard on her; she’s the jolliest little thing in the world, and keeps us all alive here, and she’s very obedient to her mother,’ cried Mr Waughope, defending her warmly, for he was her staunch friend.

‘Ah!’ said Ken, and said no more.

As for her father, he adored Moll, and let her do whatever she liked, and in spite of his wife’s remonstrances he withdrew his orders

forbidding her to go outside the bungalow without leave.

‘You need not be afraid, mother; I promise not to go into the jungle alone. To tell you the truth, I am afraid of meeting a panther,’ Moll had announced with a laugh, which the others echoed, for Moll did not know what fear meant.

So when he heard Moll’s voice, her father turned and came back towards the bungalow again to see what his favourite wanted.

‘Father, you have never taken me over the estate with you. May I come this morning, it is quite cool to-day?’ begged Moll.

‘Quite cool—eighty-two degrees in the shade! Well, it is not so hot, and there is a nice breeze; but there’s nothing to see but “those everlasting rubber-trees,” as you said the other day,’ replied Mr Meredyth.

‘I want to improve my mind; besides, it’s ridiculous to live on a rubber estate and not know what rubber is like. Mr Fish says it’s like milk; but I don’t believe him, and I want to see how such sticky stuff as india-rubber can run out of a tree by simply tapping it,’ said Moll.

‘It is about time you increased your knowledge of rubber-planting if that is all you know about it! I thought every penny magazine had had articles on the subject, until even

babies knew all about rubber. I'm sure I heard nothing but rubber talked of when I was last at home,' said her father.

'Oh that was shares! I want to be learned,' declared Moll, tripping along beside her father with as light and dancing a step as if she were in temperate England, and looking the last person in the world who desired to be learned.

'Good-morning; I've come to learn tapping and things,' she called out as they passed the office in which the young assistants were standing, making some reports:

They came out to her with friendly greeting, for Moll was a great favourite. 'Mind you don't spoil the trees,' said Ken.

Moll did not deign to give a reply to this sarcastic remark, but went on with her father to the nearest plantation, and he began to tell her about rubber and its manufacture, and Moll watched with interest the tappers cleverly running their tapping-knives along the bark of the tree and making the thick, milk-like juice to flow from them.

'I could do that,' she said suddenly.

'I bet you what you like you could not,' remarked Mr Waughope, who happened to pass by at the moment.

'Couldn't I? I am sure I could; it's quite easy, just like putting a cheese-scoop along a cheese,' declared Moll.

'Ah, that's what I thought when I came out and first saw the coolies tapping for rubber; but I soon found out my mistake. I can't tap properly even now, though I have been out three months, and tap a little every day for practice,' said Mr Waughope.

'Is that your tapping chisel hanging by your side?' demanded Moll, pointing to a tool Mr Waughope was wearing.

'Yes; but it's a knife, not a chisel,' corrected the young man.

'What's in a name? Besides, it's no more like a knife than it is to a chisel. Don't be so particular,' said Moll airily.

'It's always well to call things by their proper name. Call a spade a spade, as the proverb says,' he replied.

Mr Meredyth, the kindest-hearted of men, was so glad to see this sober and silent young man, who had seemed rather home-sick and miserable, talking cheerfully to Moll that he walked away and left him to show Moll how to tap, expecting them to come after him when Moll tired of 'rubber' and its production, which he supposed would not be long. So he sauntered along the plantation, talking to one *mandor* or overseer after another, until he had gone some distance, when Mr Fish met him and asked him to come and look at the ravages of a wild pig in a 'nursery' he had just planted.

‘The wretched animals! We must have a wild-boar hunt, Fish, or we sha’n’t have a seedling left!’ cried Mr Meredyth, and hastened to the scene of devastation, forgetting Moll; and when later on he did remember, consoling himself with the thought that Mr Waughope would take care of her, and that at any rate she was quite safe from mischief in the plantation, where there were no wild beasts and only his employés, who would kill any snake or centipede that attacked her if she wandered away from Mr Waughope.

Moll meanwhile was amusing herself getting a rise out of her companion, a very easy thing to do, as has been seen, and she replied to his last remark by saying, ‘If it comes to calling a spade a spade, this thing ought to be called a cheese-scoop; that’s exactly what it’s like. Whoever saw a knife like a tube? But this tree isn’t as easy to scoop out as a cheese. Oh bother!’

Mr Waughope came forward to see what had called forth this exclamation, and found Moll had dug into the trunk of the tree instead of just shaving the bark as she should have done, and so deep had she gone that the knife—or scoop, as she persisted in calling it—stuck fast in the tree and would not come out.

‘If you’ll excuse my saying so, Miss Moll, you are spoiling this tree and my knife. You

see, tapping trees for rubber is not so easy as it looks,' he observed, trying in vain to take the knife out.

'I'll get it out; you've no energy, you people who live out here,' she said.

'I've plenty of energy, but it's no use expending it on the wrong object, and that knife must stay there now; it will only cut the tree about if we take it out. More's the pity, for it cost three dollars,' he declared.

'Nonsense! I can easily get it out, and what does it matter if it spoils the tree? One tree more or less makes no difference when you have hundreds of thousands of them. If it had been a pretty tree it would have made all the difference,' replied Moll.

Mr Waughope smiled in a superior way. 'That shows how little you know about rubber; it spoils the look of a plantation to have a tree missing. Don't you see how regularly they are planted, exactly the same distance from each other? Planters take a great pride in the regularity of their trees.'

'A very stupid sort of pride, I call it, and it makes the scenery very monotonous. It would be much more picturesque if they planted the trees in groups, all different sizes,' remarked Moll, out of sheer contradiction, for she knew quite well that trees of the same age and size were tapped at the same time.

‘That is absurd’— began Mr Waughope ; but Moll, who was tired of being lectured and instructed, interrupted him.

‘Never mind about these stupid rubber-trees ; come and see what those Malays are fishing for,’ she put in, pointing to two men who were standing fishing on the bank of the stream.

‘They are not Malays ; they are Bengalis. I wonder you do not know the difference between Malays and Indians !’ he exclaimed.

Moll stamped her foot. ‘If I said you were a white man I suppose you would contradict me and say you were black,’ she cried.

‘No, that I should *not*,’ he replied with emphasis ; ‘but when you say a Bengali, who is a tall black man, is a Malay, who is a short brown man, of course I contradict you,’ he remarked.

‘Brown or black or yellow, it’s all the same to me ; I call them all savages,’ she retorted.

But in spite of her warnings Mr Waughope declined to let this pass. ‘The natives are anything but savages, and Sir Frank Swettenham, who knew them better than any one else, says every Malay is a gentleman.’

He spoke to the air. Moll had taken a flying leap over the stream, and was running as no one does in the tropics.

‘Miss Moll, stop—pray, stop ! you’ll get

fever if you run so fast in the heat. Where are you going?’

‘To meet my father. Please don’t come after me; I can find my way quite well.’

‘Keep to the path to the right, then!’ he shouted after her, and went off to do his work, after having taken another look at the tree Moll had hacked about; and after a long tramp over his division of the estate he came back to the bungalow where he lived with Mr Fish, to find that gentleman standing on the veranda looking out for him.

‘Hallo! what have you done with Moll Meredyth?’ he shouted.

‘Nothing. What should I have done with Miss Meredyth?’ replied Mr Waughope, laying stress on the ‘Miss.’

‘Her father says she’s a child, and we are to treat her as such, and keep an eye on her like elder brothers, so don’t come snubbing me with your “Misses.” If you like the question better, where is Moll? Mrs Meredyth has just sent a *chit** down to ask.’

Mr Waughope stood staring for a moment before he threw himself into a long chair to rest his weary, heated body. ‘She left me long ago—a couple of hours ago at least—to join her father, and if she hasn’t met him yet she’s probably hacking at all the trees she

* Note or letter.

passes; and as it's in your division, you'd better go and find her,' he announced; and then shouted for a lime-squash at once.

'That's a pretty cool way of treating the manager's daughter, even if she is a little girl. What do you mean by leaving her alone in the plantation to find her way about? I call it very ungentlemanly, to say the least of it, to say nothing of the danger,' said Mr Fish hotly.

'There can be no possible danger to her; the only danger is for the trees, and as for leaving her, *she* left me; bounded over a stream, and ran off at full speed. As for steeplechasing after my manager's daughter in the heat of the day—all I can say is that it was not in my contract, and I'll see her farther first.'

'Well, you'd better send a *chit* up to Meredyth to that effect; it'll rather please him, I should think,' remarked Mr Fish sarcastically, putting his *topee* on as he spoke.

'Here, Fish, where are you going? It's time for tiffin; I'm frightfully 'hungry!' cried Mr Waughope, sitting up and looking after him.

'Going to look after *Miss Meredyth*,' he replied pointedly.

'You'd better look after your trees,' retorted Mr Waughope, and sat for a minute doubtfully

on his long chair. Then reluctantly getting up, he muttered to himself, 'Ken was right; he said she'd be a handful, and so she is. First she gets lost in a bathroom, and then in a rubber plantation—a thing nobody in their senses could do. I suppose she's fishing again—she seems to have a mania for it—and I suppose I must go and look for her. I'll go to the bungalow first, and see if she's in her bathroom again;' and he too put on his hat.

But this time Moll was not in the bungalow, for every one in procession searched it through to assure themselves and each other that she was not there.

'I'm awfully sorry, Mr Meredyth,' stammered Mr Waughope, 'but she wouldn't let me come with her, and I never thought she could lose her way in a rubber plantation, especially with coolies working at intervals.'

'It's my fault, if it is any one's, and I'm not really alarmed; she can't possibly be lost, and I'm not going to get into a state about her again in a hurry. Stop and have tiffin, and she will be in before it is over,' said Mr Meredyth.

But the young man declared that their cook would be spoilt if they were out so much, and Mr Meredyth promised to send down if she were not back in an hour.

‘Come, Eulalie, eat your tiffin, or I shall send you off home,’ threatened her husband.

Poor Mrs Meredyth was not much inclined for food, but made some kind of a pretence. But when her husband went calmly off to his midday siesta, although the whereabouts of his daughter had not been known for three hours, her patience was sorely tried, and she was rather glad to see him really disturbed to find that she had not returned after he had had his sleep.

‘We must send round to the different *mandors*, and ask whether she has been seen. She can’t have got off the estate—it’s too big; I can’t understand it at all,’ he exclaimed.

While he was sending messages to the *mandors*, Mrs Meredyth was writing *chits* to the assistants. Kenneth was at the other end of the estate, but she sent him a note too, and within an hour they calculated every one on the estate would know that Moll was missing.

The assistants were just starting off for the afternoon’s survey when Mrs Meredyth’s notes were brought to them.

Mr Fish was much disturbed; but Mr Waughope declined to be anxious. ‘If she’s going to get lost every day we’d better take it easy, or we shall wear ourselves out,’ he declared as he started to search his division.

CHAPTER XI.

MOLL'S ADVENTURES IN A RUBBER PLANTATION.

THE tropical jungle, as has been observed, was not the gorgeous-coloured tangle of flowering trees and brilliant birds, butterflies, and reptiles that Moll expected; but, on the other hand, the rubber plantation, which she had imagined to be a dreary succession of white-trunked trees with little cups attached to them, proved to have a fern-banked stream running through it, and in the stream were little fish and big fish, to say nothing of fascinating little pink crabs.

So, feeling very hot after her run, Moll sat down and watched the crabs, and bathed her face in the clear water. The Chinaman who was tapping near by grinned insolently as he shouted something in his unmelodious tongue to a fellow-tapper some trees off.

Moll looked up at the Chinamen, and, disliking their manner, she did not know why, she moved on, only to stop again to poke an eel out of its sleep with a stick. It was like a perfect summer day in England, with this pleasant breeze, and the shady trees meeting overhead, and this pretty stream with its green banks. It was only the pangs of hunger which reminded Moll that it must be near luncheon-

time, and this fact reminded her that she was to have had a walk with her father before lunch, instead of which she had been wasting a good deal more time than she had meant to do by this stream, in which she again bathed her face and hands for the pleasure of feeling the cool water on them.

'*Mem, mem!*' shouted a voice, adding a good deal more in an unknown tongue; and Moll saw a tall, dark man (a Tamil, as a matter of fact) walking towards her and gesticulating violently.

'Are you talking Malay to me?' she inquired of him, without moving from the bank of the stream where she was seated, regardless of her white dress or of possible reptiles.

'Ya, Malay, *mem,*' he replied, happening to understand the words 'talking Malay.'

'Well, it's no good, because I can't understand a word that you are saying. Do you hear? No, not one word,' she repeated, as the man poured out a rapid torrent of words, very melodious but quite incomprehensible to his hearer.

Moll looked at the excited man for a time in perplexity. 'If I knew what you were trying to say I might be able to pacify you. As it is, it's no use your trying to talk to me,' she observed, to the poor man's evident despair; for of course he could not understand

what she was saying, and he supposed she thought he could.

At last Moll had a brilliant idea. 'I don't wish to be rude; but "Piggie," as they say here when they want you to go away.'

But Moll did not know that *pegi* is 'drive on' or 'go away' in Malay, and this man, being a Tamil who had only just arrived, did not understand it; so that unfortunately it had no effect except to make him gesticulate still more frantically.

'I'm tired of this. I think I had better "piggie" myself;' and she got up to go, to the man's evident relief.

Now there was no path to show Moll which way to go; but it struck her that the best thing she could do would be to go back the way she had come by following the stream, and she turned to do so. To her surprise, the Indian, with a swift, tiger-like spring, put himself in her way, at a respectful distance, and with a deep bow barred the way, and pointed in the opposite direction.

In vain Moll tried to dodge him; he might have had a hundred feet and arms to judge by the way they seemed to stretch in front of her. Thoroughly out of patience, she stamped her foot, and, waving him aside, set off at a run along the bank of the rivulet, followed all the time by the Indian at a distance of a few yards.

‘Go away, I tell you,’ said Moll several times when she turned round and saw the man still following her; but she might have saved herself the trouble. At last she resigned herself to her fate, and walked on, trying to pretend to herself that she did not care, though, to tell the truth, she would have preferred his not being there.

However, after a long walk, when she seemed to be no nearer her destination, and wondered how much farther she would have to walk, she saw a Malay hut, out of which came a superior-looking young man. At sight of him her uninvited companion burst forth into another torrent of talk.

‘It’s no use your talking to me, because I can’t understand Malay, I tell you,’ she said to the man, who was evidently coming to speak to her.

‘But I speak English, madam, and as you have erred in your ways, I can make you go in the right way,’ he replied, taking off his hat respectfully.

‘Oh can you? That’s a blessing!’ exclaimed Moll, too much relieved at hearing her own tongue to care what kind of English it was.

‘Yes, and you are a long way from the manager’s bungalow,’ he remarked.

‘Oh dear, am I? How far?’ asked Moll, looking rather melancholy.

‘About an hour’s walk over the clearing, and it is all in the sun; you will get a sun-stroke,’ he observed.

They were at the edge of a rubber plantation, and Moll leant up against a tree. ‘I think I must rest before I walk another bit. Could you give me a glass of water, please?’

‘I have no good water, but I could get you a cocoa-nut; the manager always drinks one when he arrives here,’ suggested the young man courteously.

‘Drink a cocoa-nut? Oh I suppose you mean that watery stuff they call milk. Yes, I’ll have one, please.’

The man who had annoyed her by following her brought out a stool from the tent for her to sit on.

‘Who is this man? And would you, please, ask him what he has been trying to say to me?’ asked Moll, seating herself with a sigh of relief.

‘He is a *kingannie*,* and he has been afraid to see you bathe in that river in your heat. He also tried to take you in the right way, and stop you erring and straying. He says you were nearer the manager’s bungalow where he met with you than you are now, madam,’ he explained.

‘What a bother!’ said Moll, her eyes fixed on the cocoa-nut tree in front of the hut, up which

* A headman over a gang of coolies.

a little black boy was swarming to knock down a cocoa-nut for her.

‘It’s delicious, simply delicious!’ she exclaimed, as she drank the liquid as directed through a hole pierced in the cocoa-nut.

Moll was hot and tired, and it was very pleasant sitting under the shade of a cocoa-nut palm and drinking cocoa-nut milk, and it was at least half-an-hour before she rose to go home.

‘This man will show you the way,’ said the young Indian.

‘Thank you ; good-bye. I wish there was a carriage of some kind ; I don’t feel much inclined for a walk in this sun.’

‘Would you wish to stay here, and send a message to the manager’s bungalow ? There is a bullock-cart going that way at this time.’

‘A bullock-cart ? Where ? Over those fields ?’ cried Moll, looking round in surprise, for there was not only no bullock-cart to be seen, but no road over which a cart could possibly go.

He gave a grave smile—for these men, as Moll found when she knew them better, never laughed much or were otherwise than grave and dignified—and remarked, ‘If madam will walk this way she will see the road winding away, and the bullock-cart is just loading with rubber cans.’

‘Oh so it is. And it is going past the bungalow, you say?’ inquired Moll eagerly.

‘It will pass near to go to the factory,’ said the man.

‘Then I will go in it,’ announced Moll.

The young man did not dare to argue with his master’s daughter; but he was rather puzzled what to do. The idea of an English *mem* getting into a bullock-cart shocked him dreadfully, even though she was only a very young lady; besides which, there was nowhere for her to sit, and it was not very clean. However, the wish of the English *mem* was law to him, and he spoke to the driver, who politely dismounted and entered into a long discussion as to how the matter was to be arranged.

While Moll, who guessed what they were talking about, sat leaning back against her cocoa-nut palm and watched the proceedings, she received a terrific bang on her left arm—such a blow that for the moment she felt perfectly dazed, and only a habit of suppressing her feelings when she was hurt prevented her from screaming with the pain. Two or three black men ran forward, and one picked up a green cocoa-nut which had fallen from the tree.

‘If it had fallen on your head you would be dead,’ said the young Indian.

Moll stifled a groan. ‘Is the cart ready? I feel rather tired,’ she said faintly.



'If it had fallen on your head you would be dead,' said the young Indian.

‘It will be directly—in a minute,’ he replied.

Moll leant back her head and shut her eyes, and felt that it was just as well that she had not to move for a minute, for everything was going round and round, and she had a bad headache.

Very cleverly the men had arranged a kind of seat of sacking, slung up so as to make a swing seat, and Moll, having with difficulty swung herself into it, found it very comfortable.

The two humped gray bullocks jogged off, and Moll, with renewed thanks to the young Indian, leant back in her hammock-seat and shut her eyes. In two minutes she was fast asleep; the *atap* roof shaded her from the sun, and the breeze, which always rises in the middle of the day, cooled her a little, and she slept on comfortably.

The young Indian had been quite correct in saying that it was an hour’s walk to the manager’s bungalow across the clearing; but he had not explained that it was a good two hours’ drive, as the road wound about in a serpentine fashion. If he had told her it would have made no difference to Moll, who would rather have made a round of two hours in a conveyance, even though it was only a bullock-cart, than walk another mile. She had no idea that she had gone to the extreme end of the

estate ; but such was the case. However, sleep, as it happened, was the thing she most needed, and she was fortunate in being able to sleep after a cocoa-nut had fallen on her arm.

As the bullock-cart jogged along, Mr Fish passed by on his motor-bicycle on his search for Moll, and never stopped or took any notice of the signs of the driver, which he took for a polite greeting, and Moll, of course, was fast asleep inside the cart, and not visible to passers-by unless they looked into it.

Mr Waughope, meanwhile, leisurely taking his usual walk through his division, could only be said to be 'searching' for the missing girl by walking over the estate where she was supposed to be lost ; but he did not appear to be looking for any one or anything, nor did he make any inquiries among his coolies as to whether they had seen her or not.

Consequently, when he got a *chit* by a heated messenger from Mr Meredyth, saying, 'Moll found—a thousand apologies for having given you all this trouble ; come to *makan* to-night and eat the fatted calf in honour of the prodigal's return,' he felt that he was being thanked for what he had not done. He wrote a civil reply declining, and walked on to finish his round.

Mr Fish, coming in at six o'clock, found him in a *sarong* and *baju*, or native jacket, in a long

chair. 'I say, you know she's found, and in a bullock-cart, which I passed, as it happened?'

'In a bullock-cart was she?' remarked Mr Waughope indifferently, puffing away at his cigarette.

'Yes, didn't you know? She was dead-beat, poor kiddie. But, I say, Waughope, hurry up, *makan* is at seven o'clock, as Moll is tired.'

'That's all right; I'm going to have *makan* like this,' he replied.

Mr Fish looked at him in horror. 'You must be mad! It's all very well to dine in *sarongs* in our own bungalow, but you can't when ladies are about; and certainly not at the manager's bungalow. Go and dress, man!'

'I'm not going. Say I'm tired if you like; I don't want to go,' announced Mr Waughope.

'Not want to go! Why not? You haven't fever, have you?' asked Mr Fish.

'No, I'm all right,' said Mr Waughope.

'Then, come on; don't be lazy,' urged Mr Fish.

'Not I. I'm fed-up with her.'

'With whom? Moll? Why, you never even looked for her, I hear!' exclaimed the latter.

'Not I. I wish she'd lost herself for ever,' declared Mr Waughope crossly.

Mr Fish looked at him severely. 'You must have fever, or ought to have, talking like

that. I shall leave you to your own company, the only kind you're fit for. Good-bye;' and Mr Fish went off, disapproving highly of such an unfriendly attitude towards the manager and his little daughter.

CHAPTER XII.

MOLL REPENTS.

‘I’VE come to eat the fatted calf, Moll, and drink to your safe return; but, I say, you had better not take these long voyages of discovery—you look fagged-out,’ Mr Fish wound up kindly, after a keen look at Moll, who had not even changed her dress, on the score of being tired, and she looked it.

‘I’m not going to,’ replied Moll, with a very subdued air.

Mrs Meredyth looked rather worried. ‘You must please excuse Moll’s dirty frock; she is tired, and I do not know that she deserves to be fêted after having caused us so much anxiety and trouble.—You must thank Mr Fish for going out to look for you after a tiring day, Moll,’ she observed.

‘Pray, don’t mention it; we were all young once, and I expect she wanted to inspect the estate, and my word she’s done it too by all accounts. We will tell the Visiting Agent that he can take a holiday this month, as a visitor from home has been all over the estate and reports—— How do you report on it?’ he inquired in a jocular tone. Mr Fish was good-nature itself, and he wanted to turn the matter into a joke and save Moll a scolding; but that

young lady was evidently in a bad temper, and not to be smoothed down.

‘I don’t know anything about the horrid estate, and I don’t want to, and what’s more, I don’t want any dinner, so please leave me alone,’ she replied.

Dinner had just been announced by a great tom-toming on the Chinese gong by the Chinese ‘boy;’ but Moll would not stir. Her mother went off to dinner without taking any notice of her; but Mr Meredyth said sharply, ‘None of your nonsense, Moll; come and have dinner at once.—It’s no use giving way to her,’ he added in Malay.

Mr Fish, who sat opposite to Moll, noticed that she never moved her left arm, and only helped herself to dishes which were soft and could be eaten with one hand. He took no notice of course, and her mother either did not observe this or else prudently abstained from making any remarks on Moll’s slightly awkward way of eating.

The three elders talked together, and left Moll alone until pudding was served; then Mr Meredyth, his anger with Moll having evaporated, turned to her, and said, ‘Come, Moll, have some cheesy toast. No? Why not? It is your favourite pudding, so you said yesterday.’

‘It’s not a pudding,’ said Moll.

'Moll'—— began her father angrily.

'Take some, dear,' said Mrs Meredyth gently.

Moll shook her head; but Mr Meredyth signed to the Chinese servant to give her some; and Moll, rather crossly, took it in her fingers and began to eat it so, which, as it was rather a liquid paste, was not easy nor elegant.

Mrs Meredyth begged her husband (in Malay) to take no notice; but he was, as has been said, very obstinate, and he told Moll to eat properly or leave the table.

With a look of relief, Moll got up from her seat; and Mr Fish, who liked a smooth life, was as relieved as she.

The two men sat and talked and smoked for an hour, and then Mr Fish rose to go, saying, 'If you will excuse me I think I will go now, as I have to be up at six o'clock muster in the morning.'

Every one said good-night, and Mr Fish was lighting his bicycle lamp when he heard his name called in a low tone. 'Hallo! who's that?' he replied.

'I—Moll. Have you got a sharp penknife?' said she.

'A penknife! What for?' demanded Mr Fish cautiously. After his experience of Moll he felt he must be careful in his dealings with her.

‘Only to cut my sleeve off,’ replied Moll.

‘Cut what off?’ asked Mr Fish, coming close up to the veranda, on which she was standing.

‘My sleeve—the sleeve of my dress. I can’t get it off without,’ declared Moll.

‘Why not? You can’t cut up your dress every time you take it off. What’s the matter? Why don’t you ask the *amah* to come and help you, or your mother?’ Mr Fish very naturally suggested.

‘Because I don’t choose to, and if you won’t lend me your penknife or a pair of scissors I shall have to go to bed in my dress, and it is so hot and uncomfortable,’ said Moll.

‘That you will not, and, I say—I won’t give you away—what’s the matter? Have you hurt your arm, young un?’ said Mr Fish.

Moll nodded. ‘It’s swollen an awful lot,’ she observed.

Mr Fish came on to the veranda. ‘Let’s look,’ and he cut the sleeve, which was evidently tight for the swollen arm, and gave a whistle. ‘I say, you must have this seen to. How did you do this?’ he asked.

‘I won’t; I should never hear the last of it—only a cocoa-nut fell on it—they’d never let me outside the bungalow again by myself. You promised not to tell, so you can’t. It will be all right; if you just cut a little more I shall be able to slip out of it then. I’ll bathe

it, and no one need be any the wiser,' announced Moll.

'All right,' said Mr Fish; but he felt that it was anything but all right. However, he had promised, and 'disliked a row,' as he put it, and so he left Moll to be her own doctor, consoling himself with the thought that there were no bones broken, but only a bad bruise and swelling which would go down in a few days, the pain of which might do her good. With this satisfactory conclusion he bicycled back to his bungalow, where he found that Mr Waughope had been entertaining Kenneth Meredyth.

'Hallo, a kind of change of partners! Well, you had the best of it to-night. Your young cousin was not in top-hole style, and it rather upset the manager,' he remarked.

'I was aware of those facts, and that was why I came down here. I know what those two are when it comes to a tug of wills, and I keep out of their way. By the bye, how did Moll manage to eat her dinner? She hadn't much appetite, had she?'

'Oh yes, pretty fair,' said Mr Fish cautiously.

'What! she *did* eat her dinner?' inquired Ken.

'She had a very fair dinner,' said Mr Fish, and pretended to be busy with his bicycle.

'Humph! I suppose you are telling the

truth ; but how she did it I don't know, for I could have vowed she had broken her arm,' he declared.

Mr Fish left his bicycle and came up to join the other two on the veranda. 'What makes you think that?' he inquired.

'Because she couldn't move it when she got out of the cart, and when I took hold of it to help her down she called out, and nearly jumped down my throat, because, she said, I pinched her ; but I noticed that it hung down stiffly. So I promptly decided to retire from the scene and dine here, and leave her parents to find out what was wrong themselves, which apparently none of you have done,' said Kenneth.

'And you have left that child with a broken arm unattended to ? I call that awfully shabby on your part, Meredyth ; it will be deformed for life very likely,' expostulated Mr Waughope.

'I thought any idiot could see there was something wrong, and expected to hear the doctor's motor go by, to tell you the truth.'

'It's not as bad as all that ; and, since you know it already, I suppose I sha'n't be breaking my word if I tell you the facts,' remarked Mr Fish. So he gave an account of his evening and Moll's arm.

'Upon my word, you are a pair of rotters ! I've a good mind to go up and tell the manager to-night,' declared Mr Waughope.

‘You’d better mind your own business; you won’t get any thanks for interfering, and Moll would be furious,’ said Kenneth.

‘I don’t care twopence about Moll’s fury, and if her arm has not been attended to in the morning I shall certainly tell her mother.’

‘Go to bed and sleep it off, Waughope; you’ll never make old bones if you go worrying over trifles like this. What’s a bruised arm, after all?’ said Kenneth Meredyth, as he got up to go.

‘Pretty bad from Fish’s account,’ was Mr Waughope’s final remark.

And ‘pretty bad’ would have been Moll’s description if she had chosen to say what she felt, which, however, nothing would induce her to do.

Mr Waughope went to bed; but, far from sleeping off his anxiety, he dreamt that Moll’s arm had to be amputated.

‘You are a funny fellow, Waughope; you wouldn’t stir a finger to find her yesterday, and now she might be your young sister by the fuss you are making,’ said Mr Fish at breakfast.

Mr Waughope took no notice; but when he was coming home to eleven o’clock tiffin he called at the bungalow, where, as luck would have it, he saw Moll lying on a long chair alone. ‘Good-morning. How is your arm?’ he stammered.

Moll had been rather pale, but she grew crimson with anger. 'Who told you there was anything the matter with it? Mr Fish, I suppose? And you can just tell him he is a mean, dishonourable man,' she replied.

Mr Waughope, curiously enough, ceased to stammer when he was roused; opposition seemed to cure his nervousness. 'Your cousin told us, and I have come to tell your mother, since Mr Fish thinks himself bound to secrecy,' he remarked pointedly.

'My arm is all right; at least you needn't worry about it,' said Moll.

'Will you tell Mrs Meredyth, or shall I?' persisted the young man.

'It's got nothing to do with you. If Kenneth has too much sense to go worrying mother about nothing, I think you might leave me alone, meddlesome!' said Moll, hurling the last word at him, as she saw that he looked obstinate.

But it had no effect upon him, for hearing Mrs Meredyth's voice he forthwith told her his tale.

Moll sat up in her chair, and glared at poor Mr Waughope. 'I'll never speak to you again,' she declared.

'Thank you, Mr Waughope. I saw there was something wrong, and I was waiting for Moll to tell me; but it appears she does not

choose to do so, and till she wishes me to attend to her arm I will certainly not interfere. It is not broken,' said Mrs Meredyth, half-smiling at the young man's concern and surprise at her apparent indifference.

Mrs Meredyth had her own theory about the management of Moll, and it is certain that no one had so much influence over the girl, who, her mother declared, could only become more sensible by being allowed to learn by experience.

Mr Waughope went away, feeling that he had better, after all, have 'minded his own business,' and sorry that he had quarrelled with Moll, whom he liked in spite of her faults.

'It's not very bad, mother,' observed Moll after the young man had gone.

Mrs Meredyth made no reply.

'Mother, don't be cross; I'm very sorry about yesterday,' said Moll.

'So am I, Mollie, for it shows how little thought or consideration you have for other people. You knew you ought to have either stayed with Mr Waughope or gone to your father; instead of which you stay out all day, and give a number of people the trouble of looking for you in this heat, and then you leave it for a stranger to tell me that your arm is hurt and requires attention.'

'I am sorry, mother, and I really will try and be more thoughtful, and you can look at

my arm and see for yourself that it is all right,' said Moll, quite penitent.

'It is not all right enough for you to move it yet, I notice. Come and show it to me,' said her mother, who could hardly suppress an exclamation when she saw the discoloured and swollen state of Moll's arm.

Moll gave a sigh of satisfaction as her mother bathed it and bound it up with some wet bandages. 'I didn't sleep a wink last night, so I'm punished; and the day before B  b   tore my hair out, so I've got a bald place on my head that hurts,' she said, making a clean breast of her adventures in the East so far.

'You had better be careful with B  b  ; she is very ill-tempered at times,' said her mother, as she bathed that place too.

Fortunately the arm was only badly bruised. A few days put it right, and peace was restored at the manager's bungalow, for Moll was on her very best behaviour, and when that was the case no girl could be more charming.

Mr Waughope did not come near his manager's bungalow, and refused Mr Meredith's good-natured invitations on one pretext or another, until it dawned at last upon the latter that the young man must have some reason for it. He decided at last that Waughope must have had bad news from

home, for he looked down in the dumps, and would not come up to tennis or anything.

Moll listened to this statement in silence, and Mrs Meredyth only said she was sorry, as he was a very nice boy.

But if Moll said nothing, like the parrot she thought the more, and presently took a resolution, the result of which will be seen in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XIII.

MOLL'S METHOD OF 'MAKING FRIENDS.'

'I CAN play tennis again now, Ken,' said Moll. 'Let's have a tennis tournament this afternoon.'

'We can't very well with three people. Waughope has got the sulks or something, and won't come near the courts; but I'll play you a single, if your arm is all right and you want a game,' replied her cousin.

'I don't want a single in this climate; it's too hot to go flying about the court after your balls; you always try and pitch them to the farthest off place from me,' objected Moll.

'Good play, Moll; but if you want a child's game I'll oblige you; anything for a quiet life,' joked her cousin.

'I'm going to play a four. Mr Waughope must come up; he can't be allowed to be so selfish as to spoil a set, and I shall go and tell him so,' she declared.

Kenneth laughed. 'I bet you what you like you will get snubbed for your pains; Waughope is a queer beggar and gets on his dignity at times, and he answered Fish and me quite shortly when we tried to get him up to tennis,' he observed.

'How much will you bet?' demanded Moll.

'I don't bet with young people on principle ; but if you get Waughope out to tennis this afternoon I will give you a box of chocolates,' said Kenneth.

'A large box ?' inquired Moll.

'Well, I don't mind promising a large box, because I sha'n't have to buy it, seeing that Waughope refused point-blank this morning ; said he had his check-roll to do up or something,' the young man replied.

Moll said no more ; but having obtained leave to go out, so long as she wore a *topee* and kept in sight of the house, she set off towards the assistants' bungalow, and standing in front of it remarked in a clear tone, 'Boy,* is that savage named Waughope at home, please ?'

Mr Waughope was lying in a long chair in the veranda, and the 'boy' was just giving him a lemon-squash when he heard Moll's voice, and sat up with a start to see Moll calmly looking at him. 'Pegi!' he said to the 'boy,' and lay down again on his chair, without a word to Moll.

It was certainly very rude of Mr Waughope ; but to be called a savage before his 'boy' was certainly equally insulting, and Mr Waughope was very young and sensitive. So he deliber-

* All coloured servants in the East are called 'boys,' even when they are grey-haired.

ately took no notice of Moll, whom he decided was a rude little girl, but went on reading, or at all events pretending to do so.

Moll watched him for a moment, and then walked on tiptoe to the flower-bed. Taking up a handful of the hard, lumpy, red soil, she threw it with a very good aim at Mr Waughope's book, and knocked it out of his hand. She could see even from that distance that the young man became very red and angry as he leant over the side of the chair and picked up the book, at the same time brushing off the dirt from his clothes.

'Stupid boy! he can't take a joke,' observed Moll in an audible aside; and, presumably to give point to the joke, she took a large bunch of red hibiscus, of which the hedge round the garden was made, and threw it at Mr Waughope. 'Please, "boy," tell your master there's a savage out here who wants to speak to the *gentleman* of the house,' came next in a small voice.

'"Boy," please tell the lady no savages are allowed on this estate,' replied Mr Waughope, without glancing at Moll, who stood in the garden, her hands behind her back, looking very mischievous.

'If I couldn't take a joke better than you can, I'd—I'd dig a deep hole and live in it,' announced Moll.

'It wouldn't be a bad idea; but I thought you were not going to speak to me again,' observed Mr Waughope, coming to the side of the veranda.

'I can't help your thinking stupid things,' began Moll.

'But you said so,' persisted Mr Waughope.

'Is that what you have been brooding over so long? Well, you had better not take all I say for gospel—because it isn't,' replied Moll.

'So I see; but excuse my correcting you. I have not been brooding; I simply didn't come up because a gentleman does not go where he is not wanted.'

'Oh gentlemen! we're not talking about gentlemen—we're talking about you. Come and play tennis,' scoffed Moll.

'Thank you, but ladies don't generally play with men who are not gentlemen, and so I think I had better not,' replied Mr Waughope, getting huffy again.

'I'm not a lady, so it doesn't matter; you're only a boy and I'm a girl, and, I say, do come on. My arm's all right again—thanks to your telling mother, so that she bandaged it up,' observed Moll.

'In that case I shall be very pleased to come,' said Mr Waughope going to fetch his racket with alacrity, for he was longing for a game of tennis.

'I suppose you'll think it your duty to go and tell mother that I threw mud at you and called you a savage?' Moll remarked as they walked up to the tennis-court together.

'What do you take me for?' inquired her companion indignantly.

'Take you for?' repeated Moll innocently. 'I take you for a person who always does his duty however disagreeable it is.'

'My duty does not consist in making any complaints about your treatment of me; and if you will believe my word, which perhaps you will not, as you have such an extraordinary opinion of me, I shall not mention the matter at all,' said Mr Waughope stiffly.

'Oh dear, you do talk on stilts! Come down!' cried Moll, making a pantomimic gesture with her hand to describe a descent.

Mr Waughope laughed, and, his bad temper being dispelled, he talked more naturally to Moll, with whom, being only a youth himself, he felt more at home than with the others at Bukit Ayer.

'Have you written for that box of chocolates, Ken?' Moll called out as they approached the tennis ground, where Kenneth Meredyth and Mr Fish were having a game of singles.

'Oh-h!' said Kenneth, in his surprise standing still to stare at Moll and her companion.

'Game and set!' shouted Mr Fish, where-

upon his opponent awoke to the fact that he was in the middle of a serve and had let the ball drop unheeded quite near him. 'There now, Moll, look what you have done!' he exclaimed.

'What have I done now, pray?' demanded Moll, throwing herself down on a seat in the shade.

'You've made me lose my game, of course,' replied her cousin.

'I like that—Adam; always throwing the blame on Eve. That's the worst of men; they are all mean, more or less. I do wish I had some girls out here. I used to think they were rather petty, and that boys were better fun; but I have found out my mistake since I have been out here with nothing but boys and men and men and boys all round.'

'Well, that's funny, because this place has had just the opposite effect upon me,' said Mr Waughope.

'What do you mean? You can't have got tired of *mems*, as you call them, because there aren't any here,' observed Moll.

'I didn't quite mean that; but I do think society without any *mems* is nicer than with them out here; I mean as a general rule,' stammered Mr Waughope, who had spoken without much thought, and regretted his rashness when he saw the faces of his hearers.

'Thanks! Then I'll go home and leave you to a nice game of tennis,' declared Moll, getting up to go.

'What nonsense! Waughope doesn't know what he's talking about. Every one's awfully glad to have a *mem* to play with,' cried Mr Fish politely.

'I don't know what you mean, Waughope. Our great complaint out here is that there are no *mems*, and no *mems* mean no society and no dances or anything.—He's the only man who likes that state of things,' Ken remarked.

'I'm nothing of the sort. You know yourself Brown and Bishop, and all those fellows who were here the other day, said how much nicer it was on estates where there were no *mems*, and that as soon as one arrived she spoilt everything, and you had to wear collars and things,' persisted Mr Waughope, who was very obstinate and not very tactful.

'The horrid wretches! I believe that those were the young men who came to tiffin the other day (without being asked or anything), and talked rubber with you and father the whole time, and never took any notice of mother or me. I said to mother that they were very bad-mannered, and she said it was the result of there being no ladies, only bachelors, and that they became regular savages, like Mr Waughope,' remarked Moll.

'I am quite sure that she never said anything of the sort,' protested Kenneth.

'She did; those were her very words,' said Moll.

'In that case I shall certainly not trespass on my manager's private grounds,' declared Mr Waughope, getting up in his turn to go.

'What rot this is, Waughope; my aunt never said any such thing, you may take my word for it. I don't know what Moll is thinking of to talk like that; she's only chaffing you, old man.'

'I don't know what Mr Waughope is getting into a temper about now; if it is because mother said men became savages when there were no *mems* about, I don't see why he should be offended any more than you or Mr Fish; besides, as it happens, there are *mems* here, so it doesn't apply to you,' observed Moll, who had quite forgotten that she had mischievously added Mr Waughope's name to her mother's remarks (which she had repeated quite accurately), making it appear that Mrs Meredyth had called that young man a savage.

'Stop being a couple of children, and have a game, you two,' suggested the peace-loving Mr Fish.

'Yes, do, Mr Waughope; I promise I won't call you a savage or anything any more—to-day, if you will stop and play with me;

besides, you'll make me lose a large box of chocolates if you don't,' urged Moll.

'Are we playing for a prize, then? That's good,' inquired Mr Fish, as he went to take his place, Mr Waughope having allowed himself to be calmed down again enough to play.

'You are not, but I am to have a box of chocolates—a large box—as a reward for kindly bringing Mr Waughope up to make a fourth at tennis,' explained Moll.

They all laughed, and Kenneth remarked, 'Yes, and I must say, seeing the mood you are in, that I rather wonder how you managed it.'

'I threw mud at him,' jerked out Moll as she made her first serve.

'You never did!—I say, Waughope, you must keep her in order better than that; she'll lead you the life of a dog if you let her.—I certainly don't think, Moll, that you deserve chocolates gained in such a way,' said Kenneth severely.

'You can't get out of it like that. There wasn't anything about the way I got Mr Waughope here; he is here, and that is all I promised to do,' declared Moll, who was most energetic and evidently enjoying her game very much.

After the game was over, and they had rested a few minutes, Moll suddenly remarked, 'I do wish I could go down that lovely shady

walk into the jungle there. Don't you feel inclined for a stroll, Ken ?'

'No, I do not, nor would you if you had been walking about the estate all day,' he replied.

'You weren't too tired to play tennis, you selfish man !' said Moll.

'I'll take you, if you like, Moll,' said Mr Waughope.

'All right, come along,' said Moll, and the two went off amicably together.

The other two looked after them with amused looks, and then burst out laughing.

'They are a funny couple !' said Kenneth.

'I say, Moll, don't you fall out in the jungle with Waughope, or he'll leave you there, and you'll get eaten by a tiger or a bear, like the naughty little children !' cried Mr Fish.

But Moll was talking gaily to Mr Waughope, and paid no heed.

'It's well to be young,' said Mr Fish with a melancholy air. He was twenty-eight, and declared that he felt thirty-eight in this lonely jungle till Moll came out to liven them up.

'Cheer up !' said Meredyth ; and then the two walked off to talk 'rubber' till dinner-time, while Moll and Mr Waughope walked on and on along the beautiful jungle-path, enjoying every inch of it, with its insects and lizards and butterflies and the luxuriant fresh green all round them.

CHAPTER XIV.

MOLL GOES FISHING.

‘I SAY, you fellows, have you got a spare bedroom here, do you think?’ demanded Kenneth Meredyth of his two fellow-assistants one evening.

He had strolled down after dinner to smoke a cigar with them, and found them lying on their long cane chairs in *sarongs* and *bajus*, as was their custom.

‘Considering that you built this bungalow, or at any rate superintended the building of it, I consider that inquiry disingenuous, a trait in the character which I dislike,’ observed Mr Fish.

‘What’s she done now?’ inquired Mr Waughope.

‘I don’t see that we shall get much “for-arder” if you answer question by question; and as for being disingenuous, I only tried to be polite,’ retorted Kenneth.

‘I see,’ said Mr Fish; ‘then I, making the same effort, reply, it is a tight job for three, but there is always the coal-hole.’

‘There being no coal or coal-hole, I may take it that you are full up,’ said Kenneth, not in the least offended apparently by this chilling reception of his suggestion that he should make a third in the assistants’ bungalow.

'What has the "eternal feminine" done, as Waughope here tersely put it? For I presume it is to her vagaries that we are indebted for this anxiety to share our humble abode,' remarked Mr Fish.

'Oh dry up with your pompous speeches, Fish; your abode is not in the least humble, it's a jolly fine bungalow—every bit as good as ours, only a bit smaller. You should have had to rough it as I did in a Malay hut, with two rooms and a mud floor; it would have done you good, and knocked some of the starch out of you "haw-haw" young 'varsity men,' declared Kenneth.

'If you mean me, nothing would have induced me to live in that hut of yours. Why, a native wouldn't live in it; even the poorest of them have their huts raised off the ground. I wonder you were not killed by a snake,' said Mr Waughope with energy.

'Poof! I didn't sleep on the floor, man, and they don't come through mosquito curtains. You'll never make a colonist if you are not prepared to face trifles like that. Your heel kills a snake at a pinch when you have no stick handy. I have polished off more than one that way,' said Kenneth.

'I polished off one the other day much more easily than that,' said Mr Fish.

'How?' inquired Mr Waughope, very much

interested in the subject; for, however lightly Kenneth might talk of snakes, they are a serious danger in all warm climates and new country.

'I mesmerised it,' announced Mr Fish very gravely.

'You don't say so! How did you do it?' asked the other.

'I looked at it with a glassy eye, made a few passes over it, and, hey presto! it was dead.'

There was silence for a moment after this, and then Mr Waughope remarked, 'That's a very strange tale.'

'Very,' echoed Kenneth dryly.

Mr Waughope cast a withering glance at the mendacious Mr Fish, who only smiled and said, 'Talking of strange tales, have you none to tell us? What is Moll's latest?'

'Nothing. Peace and quiet reigns at our bungalow. Waughope has tamed the shrew; and as long as he takes her weird expeditions, and thus uses her superfluous energy, she seems to be quite normal. So you can continue your attendance *ad lib.*,' Kenneth Meredyth assured him.

'Then why on earth do you want to come and crowd us out? I must say I consider it very selfish of you, Ken, when you've got the run of a big bungalow up yonder and a com-

fortable bedroom, to want to take our best room, for of course we should have to give it up to you. It's not the desire for our society, for you can have that as it is. You've not had a row with your uncle, have you?'

'Dear me, no; it's merely—*sarongs*,' said Ken.

The other two understood and laughed, as they looked at their visitor in an immaculate white suit, buttoned up to the neck with the Siamese old silver coins, which is the fashion at present among Englishmen in Malaya, while they were lightly attired in the native dress—a dark printed roll of linen, two yards round, as a skirt, and a loose tusser-silk *baju* as a shirt, which is the coolest attire possible.

'If that's all, why don't you slip out of your bathroom door in yours? It's dark, and no one would see you; or have one of ours, and let us play dummy bridge,' suggested Mr Fish, always desirous of peace and a pleasant life.

Ken shook his head. 'It's not worth while; I should have to change back into the togs of civilisation. Moll's eyes are too sharp, and I should never hear the last of it if I demeaned myself, as she calls it, by putting on native dress.'

'No, it's awfully comfortable, but it's not exactly the dress to interview ladies in. Oh,

help!' and, with one bound like the spring of a tiger, Mr Fish was off his long chair and out of the veranda.

'What on earth has taken him?' began Mr Waughope, gazing after the disappearing figure of his colleague.

'Clear, man—sharp!' muttered Kenneth.

Mr Waughope, being very deliberate in his movements, turned to look at Kenneth Meredyth. 'Why?' he demanded; and then, following the direction of Kenneth's eyes, he saw Moll standing at the top of the steps of the veranda and looking with disapproval at him.

Without another word, and with no attempt at a greeting to Moll, Mr Waughope gathered himself together and ran at full speed into his bedroom.

'Come along, father, we'd better go back home; we are not wanted here,' said Moll's clear voice.

'Don't go, Moll; we'll be back in a second!' called out Mr Fish, and almost as he said this he reappeared, hastily buttoning up his white coat.—'Come in, Meredyth. Have a drink?—What is it to be, Moll?' Mr Fish invariably greeted his visitors in this way.

'Nothing. I've told you before I'm not a dried-up well. You're far too fond of drink out here,' replied Moll.

Mr Fish looked most injured at this ungrateful reception of his offer and the groundless accusation.

‘Considering that I never drink anything but cocoa-nut milk or water during the day, and one or two stingers at most in the evening, I can scarcely be said to be fond of drink,’ he replied.

‘You drink at least a gallon of water or cocoa-nut a day, and if that isn’t drinking too much I don’t know what is. But you had gone to bed, I’m afraid,’ Moll observed.

‘Not at all—not at all,’ Mr Fish assured her.

‘Sorry if we disturbed you, Fish; but I wanted to tell you that there will be no second shift [of work] to-morrow, and Moll wanted a walk, so she came with me,’ explained Mr Meredyth.

‘Good news. I shall go over to Parker’s after tiffin,’ announced Mr Fish.

‘I’ll come with you,’ remarked Kenneth.

‘Don’t you say you’ll go *too*, Mr Waughope, because I want you to go fishing with me,’ said Moll.

‘Fishing! Not in your bath I hope?’ laughed Mr Fish.

‘There’s no fishing here, Moll, unless you go in for crab-hunting or tadpoles,’ protested her father.

‘Yes, there is; there are real fish in that dear little shady stream in your plantation, and I should so like to catch some,’ insisted Moll.

‘I—I should be delighted, but I haven’t got my rod out here,’ stammered Mr Waughope, who had not recovered from the shock of Moll’s unexpected appearance while he was in his free-and-easy attire.

‘That doesn’t matter; I’m going to use a fishing-net,’ explained Moll.

Mr Waughope was not fond of touching animals, as will be remembered, and he did not very much care about fishing; but he did enjoy an afternoon with Moll, in her better moods; so, conquering his aversion to handling ‘creatures,’ he agreed to go.

‘Fancy talking about fishing, and then going out with a net! And where will you get the net?’ asked Mr Fish.

‘Mosquito-netting,’ said Moll.

‘I’m sorry to be a spoil-sport,’ put in Mr Meredyth at this point; ‘but I’m afraid your division will have to be worked in the afternoon as well, Waughope.’

‘Oh father, what a bother! Can’t you leave those tiresome old rubber-trees for one day? It can’t make any difference surely?’ cried Moll, looking so disappointed that her father relented.

‘We can’t stop tapping unfortunately, or we

should certainly not tap on Sundays, which we have been obliged to do; but I'll tell you what I will do. I can motor round that way and just get out and give a look to them if you will be back by five o'clock to take muster; that will give you a good couple of hours to fish in,' he agreed good-naturedly.

Mr Waughope expressed his gratitude; and, the morrow's programme being satisfactorily arranged, Mr Meredyth, with a twinkle in his eye, observed, 'We will leave you to enjoy peace and liberty. Good-night!'

'I shouldn't wonder if those young men became quite savages in time,' declared Moll to her father as they strolled home together, Kenneth having stayed to have a game of cards.

'I should, if you are alluding to their wearing *sarongs* in the bungalow. I may inform you that I wear nothing else when I am alone, and I felt quite regretful when your mother returned from England and I gave it up. Some men don't give it up even when they have women-folk,' announced Mr Meredyth.

'I'm glad you do; I shouldn't feel as if you were my father if you wore that dress,' said Moll.

Moll spent the next morning making two fishing-nets out of mosquito muslin and wire, and was ready for a start at two o'clock.

Mrs Meredyth demurred a little at her setting out in such heat instead of having a midday rest first; but Mr Meredyth said she had better let Moll expend her superfluous energy; and so, well protected from the sun by a *topee* and green veil and coarse white linen frock, Moll, under Mr Waughope's charge, went off on their fishing expedition.

'And mind you are back at five sharp to take the names!' shouted Mr Meredyth.

'You may depend upon me,' replied Mr Waughope, as he took Moll's nets from her and carried them.

The plantation was soon reached, and the two sauntered along in the cool and refreshing shade till they came to the stream.

'This looks a good place,' suggested Moll, making a halt.

Mr Waughope looked doubtful. 'It's very shallow, and I don't see any fish. Why this spot?'

Moll pointed to the tree overshadowing it. 'Lonely and shady, and as for the fish, we can stick our nets in the stream and catch anything that comes along,' she explained.

'That's one way of fishing,' remarked Mr Waughope, seating himself under the tree and watching Moll as she fixed her net so as to catch any fish that came along. He thought it very unlikely that they would swim straight

into this obvious trap ; but as he did not want to catch any fish, and was enjoying Moll's conversation, she being in her best mood apparently, he did not object to her methods.

'Wretch !' cried Moll, suddenly breaking off in the middle of a remark to her companion.

'What have I done ?' he demanded, thinking she was addressing him.

'Nothing ; it's a horrid frog that has got into my net and torn a hole in it !' she cried.

'You can have mine ; I am not particularly keen about fishing,' he replied.

'Thank you, I will ; you are no sportsman. Oh here comes a lovely big long fish !' she exclaimed.

'It's an eel, and it will tear the net to pieces,' expostulated Mr Waughope.

But Moll never listened to advice ; and having made a dive with her net to catch the eel, she had the mortification of seeing it wriggle and writhe until it had torn her net off its wire and swept it down the stream.

'If you 'd attended to what I said——' began Mr Waughope unwisely, getting up as he spoke to rescue the other net, and removing his coat to do so.

'If ifs and ands were pots and pans we shouldn't be fishing at all perhaps, but catching fish by wishing,' retorted Moll.

Mr Waughope struggled with the net, and

Moll cast her eyes upon his watch; it was half-past four. She put the hands back an hour and a half, and laid it down again.

‘What is the time?’ asked Mr Waughope, seeing Moll putting down his watch.

‘By your watch it is three o’clock,’ she replied.

‘Is that all?’ asked Mr Waughope. ‘I thought we had been here much longer.’

‘That is very rude; it sounds as if you were bored with me,’ said Moll.

‘Not at all; it was only the sun. I fancy my watch must have stopped. No, it hasn’t; but for once in its life it has gone wrong, for the sun is long past three. I’m sorry, Moll, but we must go back; I can’t trust this watch,’ repeated Mr Waughope.

‘It’s only ten minutes’ walk to the office,’ said Moll.

‘Yes, but I don’t know the time; it can’t be far off five,’ declared Mr Waughope.

‘It’s only half-past four,’ said Moll.

Mr Waughope stared at her. ‘How do you know?’ he asked.

‘I made it three o’clock for a joke,’ she remarked.

Mr Waughope said nothing, but put on his coat.

‘I shouldn’t have let you be late,’ she argued.

'No, I should not have allowed you to,' he retorted, and walked on in silence.

'I should be sorry to be you, not able to take a joke,' remarked Moll.

'I should be sorry to call that a joke,' said Mr Waughope.

Moll sighed. 'Well, I've enjoyed my afternoon very much, all the same. Haven't you?'

'Yes, but you have spoilt it by taking an unpardonable liberty, if it was nothing worse. I wish you were more trustworthy,' he remarked.

To his surprise, Moll replied, 'So do I.'

Whereupon Mr Waughope came off his dignity and forgave her; but he did not return to the fishing.

CHAPTER XV.

A 'NON-RUBBER' DINNER-PARTY.

A FEW days after the fishing expedition, Mr Fish and Mr Waughope found among their daily post and newspapers two small envelopes addressed in a childish round-hand; and, though they had not seen her handwriting before, they both ejaculated, 'Moll! What's her latest?'

Inside each envelope there was a card hand-printed as follows: 'Moll Meredyth requests the pleasure of Mr Fish's [or Waughope's] company to a NON-RUBBER dinner on Tuesday next, 1st May, 7.50 P.M. P.T.O.'

'I suppose it is a May-day festival,' remarked Mr Fish, 'and that is why Moll invites us.'

'Yes, but why a non-rubber dinner?' asked the other.

'That's only her playful way of putting it; she means that we are not going to eat rubber. She says we think and talk rubber all day and dream rubber all night,' explained Mr Fish.

'H'm, she doesn't generally make feeble jokes like that; there's usually some point in her jokes,' mused Mr Waughope.

'Rather too much point; inclined to prick, eh?' laughed Mr Fish, sitting down to answer

the invitation at the writing-table in the mosquito room, a room on the veranda made entirely of wire-gauze, in which the young men took refuge when the lamps were lit and the mosquitoes and other insects became unbearable.

'I say, Waughope, it's a case of dress-clothes, I suppose?' he shouted out.

Mr Waughope had been turning about the card in his fingers, and noticed P.T.O., and on the back, 'White clothes *de rigueur*,' which he read out.

'That's a blessing anyway; it's cruelty to animals to make us wear European evening-dress out here. They never used to, the old planters tell me; it's these fashionable *mems* who have done it; but Mrs Meredyth's a brick, I will say that for her, and doesn't stand on her dignity as most of them do out here.'

Mr Waughope, having nothing better to do, was playing with the invitation card, the wording of which seemed to excite his curiosity. 'I bet you anything Moll has got something up her sleeve about this non-rubber dinner,' he said at last.

'Done for you—what shall it be?' began Mr Fish.

But Mr Waughope replied stiffly, 'It was only a figure of speech. As you know, I don't bet.'

'Then you had better amend your speech.'

When a fellow offers to make a bet you suppose he means it,' retorted Mr Fish, irritated at his companion's superior attitude.

What would have been the end of this altercation is uncertain; for, spying Kenneth Meredyth passing along the road to the office, Mr Fish hailed him to ask what this dinner-party of Moll's meant.

'She's asking all the *sinna durai* for miles round; she says the poor boys need a change and some excitement badly,' replied Kenneth, laughing.

'There's nothing very exciting about a dinner-party, even a non-rubber one, whatever that may mean, with nothing but young men; Moll says so herself. I wonder, if she wanted excitement, that she did not go in for a tennis tournament or a gymkhana,' observed Mr Fish, coming out of the mosquito room with his acceptance in his hand, and giving it to Kenneth to deliver for him.

'That's what I said to Moll, but she says it will be exciting enough,' he replied; 'but what a non-rubber dinner means I know no more than yourself. Some of my cousin's nonsense; she is as full of tricks as a monkey.'

'I expect she has got a surprise for us, or why should she send out the invitations?'

'Oh didn't she say it's her birthday?'

said Ken.

'Her birthday! I say, I wish we could give her some sort of a surprise, Ken. What do you say to a Kling dance—you know, with tom-toms and songs and torches, and the tiger-dance, and all that?' cried Mr Fish.

'That is not a bad idea; let's give it in her honour as a birthday present; it won't cost so much divided between three.—Waughope, you'll join, won't you?' said Kenneth.

'With pleasure; not that I know what a Kling dance is,' replied Mr Waughope readily.

'Of course you've never seen one; it's a weird and wonderful affair, and well worth seeing and hearing once; but it's a trifle noisy, and apt to pall after a time. The Malay dance is better, but we haven't any working on our estate, and I like our Klings;* they are the nicest coolies on the estate,' explained Kenneth, who had been wondering what he could give his cousin, and was pleased at this way of amusing and paying a compliment to his young cousin on her birthday.

For the next week about a dozen young men called at different times upon the assistants of Mr Meredyth's rubber estate to ask what on earth a non-rubber dinner meant, and to propound their own theories on the subject, but went away as wise as they were before they came. No one understood the expression.

* A Kling is an imported coolie, generally a native of India.

At 7.25 punctually fourteen young men in motor-cars, on motor bicycles, and in rickshaws, forming an impromptu procession, were seen coming up the drive in the bright moonlight, and Moll, in her pretty schoolgirl's evening-dress, leant over the balcony and watched the procession arrive. 'They *are* wrapped up,' she observed.

'They want to keep their white clothes clean for the dinner. I wonder how they will enjoy it,' said her father, an amused look on his face.

The young men, who were very shy in the presence of two ladies, though one was only a child, had hardly got rid of their outwraps and tidied themselves when the dinner-bell rang, and the curtains, which had been erected for the occasion, were drawn back by two Chinese 'boys' and disclosed the dining-room one mass of crimson hibiscus, flame of the forest, bright red, and acacia blossoms, while on the long table by way of contrast were tiny rubber-trees, from one to two feet high, planted in rubber-seeds, long, shiny, oval seeds about the size of a sparrow's egg; rubber-seeds hung in festoons from the lamps, and the menus stood in pyramidal pedestals of rubber-seeds, and each one's place was indicated by his initial in rubber-seeds, which occasionally had slipped from their places, making the reading

of the letters a little difficult, which, however, broke the ice.

Loud were the exclamations at sight of the unusual decoration of the dining-table.

'But look here, Miss Moll, this is a rubber dinner. You said "non" —' — cried one. He stopped abruptly as a rubber-seed hit him above the eye.

'I suppose that was sarcastic, and you meant it was a rubber dinner' — Again a seed hit the second speaker.

'Because we are all rubber-planters,' suggested a third, to meet with the same fate.

'I say, have you got many more rubber-seeds on your lap?' inquired Mr Waughope, who was sitting next Moll. He immediately received a rubber-seed on his cheek, and demanded, 'What did you do that for?'

'Why, that's the joke, can't you see, Waughope?' cried Mr Fish, who was very quick-witted.

'No, I don't see any joke,' retorted Mr Waughope, whom the seed had hit rather hard, and who felt his dignity injured by the liberty. He was surprised, to tell the truth, to see Mrs Meredyth sitting quietly at the bottom of the table smiling at Moll, while Mr Meredyth laughed outright at the young men's mystified faces.

'I see,' cried Ken, 'we are, none of us, to

say—no, Moll, I haven't said it—the substance which has brought us out from our native land.'

'Rubber!' they cried simultaneously, and were greeted with a perfect shower of seeds, as Moll flung them at all her guests.

'Now, that will do, Moll,' said her mother quietly. 'I think you have impressed upon your guests the meaning of the title you have given to your dinner-party and the subject of conversation which is tabooed.'

'That was neatly put. Well, if we are not to talk of—it—what are we to talk about?' inquired Mr Meredyth.

'Anything you like, papa, only not that; I am so tired of it,' declared Moll.

Half-a-dozen times did a young man begin and get half the word out, only to swallow it in haste and turn the conversation; but by the time the third course was served conversation was in full swing on other topics than rubber and rubber-planting, with its trials and troubles and difficulties, which are more numerous than the complacent holder of shares imagines.

At the end of the dinner one of the visitors remarked, 'Well, I had no idea it would be such a relief not to talk shop, and I had no idea that we could get through a dinner-party without it.'

'Now you know it you had better start an

Anti-Shop Talking League, or you will become monomaniacs,' declared Moll, as they sat about in easy-chairs on the veranda, where they had not long been seated when they heard a most unearthly hubbub.

'Is it a riot?' cried Moll, starting up in alarm, for there had been a good deal of unrest among the coolies on the neighbouring plantations lately.

'Let's look and see,' suggested Mr Fish, leading the way to the front of the veranda, and placing Moll's chair in the middle at the top of the flight of steps.

The torchlight procession was visible now, and the singing and beating of the tom-toms sounded clearer.

'Sounds like a religious procession,' said Moll.

'It is a Kling dance in your honour, Moll,' said Ken, smiling at his cousin's bewilderment.

And now the picturesque throngs were seen, dancing and throwing their heads, arms, and bodies about with a queer jerky movement in time to the loud monotonous chant that they sang to the accompaniment of the tom-toms and triangles which they beat.

On they came, lighted by the torch-bearers, and followed by a crowd of women and children—all very dark, being natives, in this case, of Southern India. They formed a large ring

on the gravel in front of the veranda, under the direction of the chief *kingannie*, or overseer, who kept men, women, and children in good order by means of a long cane, which seemed to reach for yards and chastise an unruly member of his troupe. The moon was down, but the torches lit up the scene brilliantly.

The three givers of the surprise fête looked at Moll from time to time to see how she was enjoying the show, and were well satisfied with her absorbed attention and little cries of delight as the men twirled lighted torches above their heads, twisting and turning and contorting their bodies all the time.

'It's simply wonderful. How did they know we had a party?' cried Moll; and then, seeing the pleased looks of her nearest neighbours, who happened to be her cousin and the two young assistants, she added, 'Why, I believe it's your surprise! Well, it's the nicest birthday treat I could possibly have. I never had anything like this in England.'

And then her attention was caught by the antics of the new dancer, who was swinging about a burning hoop, into which, after a little time, he jumped, and then used as a skipping-rope, with which he did all sorts of feats. But all these were only precursors of the great event, the tiger-dance, for which the arena was cleared by the *kingannie*, with the aid of his



'Well, it's the nicest birthday treat I could possibly have.'

long stick, which descended upon big and little intruders on the space required for this curious performance.

'They are pretending to be two tigers,' Mr Fish explained to Moll, as she sat and gazed fascinated at the strange movements of the men—now advancing with leaps and bounds on each other, now stealthily moving round and round, now crouching, now rising to their full height, with fingers curled like claws. Other spectators held their breath besides Moll, whose vivid imagination carried her away until she almost fancied that she was watching the struggle between two wild beasts, so natural and realistic was the display. At last the stronger and more nimble man prevailed, and, grappling his opponent in a mock death-struggle, he got him underneath, and, after having vanquished him, leapt triumphant to his feet and commenced a triumphal dance round the dead 'tiger,' who for his part 'played the game,' and lay dead until he was dragged off the scene by some of his fellow-Indians.

'Oh is it over?' cried Moll, with a long-drawn sigh, as the performers (all men of course, as no woman would be allowed to perform in public) and their wives and families crowded up to the veranda for thanks and appreciation, which they duly received—first by applause and clapping, and then by hand-

fuls of small coins thrown by all the spectators at once.

It was mistaken kindness, as it turned out, for there was a wild rush to the front, a scramble in the dark, for the torches were speedily abandoned and flung to the ground in the mad search for wealth, in which men, women, and little children, some almost babies, joined.

The monotonous beating of the tom-toms was exchanged for the weeping and wailing and shrieks of women and children, growing shriller and shriller as the excitement increased, until a veritable pandemonium reigned.

Moll grew pale and trembled with fright, and even Mrs Meredyth was seriously alarmed ; but Mr Meredyth, who had seen this sort of performance often before, and was now quietly writing in his mosquito room, came out at this unwonted termination to the play, and, stepping to the front of the veranda, called out in Tamil. His voice rang above the shrieks and yells of the frenzied crowd ; and in less time than it takes to relate the tumult died away, and the chief *kingannie*, taking once more the command, marshalled his troupe and led them away.

'What a scene !' cried Mr Waughope.

'Do you refer to the dance or its sequel ?' inquired Moll, copying his stilted way of talking.

'I meant both. It has quite tired me out, it was so exciting,' he replied.

'It is almost as good as an Earl's Court exhibition,' observed Mr Fish.

'Oh how can you?' cried Moll indignantly.

'Well, I've seen that lighted hoop business at home, and by niggers too,' declared Mr Fish.

'That was only a horrid copy; this is the original thing, and far cleverer,' protested Moll.

'They gave me a fright at the end; I thought some of the children were being crushed to death,' said Mr Waughope.

'A lot of that was put on—that screaming, I mean—and a lot of it was overwrought nerves; they worked themselves up in the dance,' said Mr Meredyth.

'Put on?' inquired Moll.

'Yes, they wanted to scare each other away so as to get the money themselves. You will hear scratching and scraping round the bungalow all night, so don't be alarmed—it will only be searchers for stray coins,' said Ken.

And then Moll's non-rubber dinner-party broke up, and the guests went away, after very sincere thanks and assurance that they had not enjoyed themselves so much for a very long time.

CHAPTER XVI.

MOLL GOES OFF ON A JAUNT.

‘**Y**ES, it has answered very well having Moll out; she is a little paler, but she is in excellent health,’ said Mrs Meredyth to the doctor, who was paying one of his periodical visits to the estate, and was asking after his favourite.

‘Yes, and she does not seem to be the mad-cap her schoolmistress made out. You see I was right, after all; the girl is as good as one could wish when she is properly handled; there’s nothing like a mother’s care. I don’t mind confessing to you now that I was more than a trifle nervous about the whole business, because it is not easy to find safe occupation for a young lady in this country—even India would be better; but Moll’s love of nature and all creatures that dwell upon the earth evidently seems to make her quite happy upon the estate,’ agreed the doctor.

‘It is true, her love of her mother and her love of nature are very strong points with Moll. She amuses herself under the bungalow trying to teach the monkeys tricks; she has inherited her father’s love of animals, and if I did not protest very strongly they would have them over-running the bungalow,’ said Mrs Meredyth.

The doctor laughed. 'I was wondering what she would do for young companions. So she consoles herself for the absence of girl friends by playing with the monkeys, does she?' he observed.

'And with our youngest assistant, a very good and quiet boy, who, however, has a will of his own, and, to tell you the truth, I have to thank him for stopping many a prank that Moll would otherwise have played; and though she is generally indignant at the time, they are as good friends as ever the next day; and I trust him to take her for walks in the jungle and for fishing expeditions,' explained Mrs Meredyth.

She had scarcely said this when Moll came into the bungalow in a great state of excitement. 'Oh mother'—she began. Then, seeing the doctor, she added, 'I beg your pardon, how do you do? I'm in such a hurry. I want to go to Kuala in the car with Mr Waughope.—May I, mother? Do say yes. He says he's on estate business, and can't waste time and petrol waiting for me.'

Mrs Meredyth and the doctor smiled at the young man's ungallant attitude, and the doctor remarked, 'Let her go with him, Mrs Meredyth. After all, life is a little dull for her in the jungle, and young Waughope is a very safe chauffeur, I know, and a day's outing will do her good.'

‘Yes, yes, mother; let me go!’ cried Moll, dancing with impatience.

‘Very well; be sure you are good and sit still, and be back for tiffin.’

‘All right, and thank you,’ cried Moll. ‘Good-bye; we’ll have a lovely day and come back quite safe,’ and she ran down the steps and along the palm-tree avenue as if it were a cool day, without stopping to hear her mother’s parting injunctions.

The doctor got up to look after her. ‘Steady there; petrol is cheaper than fever,’ he called out.

But Moll only waved her hand, without turning to look back or slacken her pace.

‘What energy in the tropics! She won’t keep that up long. How many months has she been here?’ inquired the doctor.

‘Three months and a day, to be exact, and I don’t suppose we have been farther than the next estate half-a-dozen times since she arrived. But I hope she will not stay out too long,’ said Mrs Meredyth.

‘I should not imagine she will stay a minute longer than her chauffeur wishes, and that will be as long as his business takes to get through, judging from that remark of his,’ said the doctor.

‘He is very conscientious, but Moll circumvents him sometimes,’ and Mrs Meredyth

smiled at some recollection, which made the doctor inquire what was amusing her.

‘It was really very naughty of her. They went fishing, and Mr Waughope, who would not omit a duty on any account, said he would take her on condition that they got back in two hours, as he had some coolies to pay, I fancy; and what did the naughty girl do but put his watch, which he had laid on the bank beside him, back every ten minutes or so.’

The doctor laughed long and heartily. ‘How long did it take to make up that quarrel?’ he asked.

‘Mr Waughope was very angry, and nearly reduced Moll to tears by saying that she had no sense of honour, in which it seems he considers women deficient.’

‘The young prig! I should think Moll’s companionship would do *him* good,’ exclaimed the doctor.

The doctor and Mrs Meredyth were soon joined by the planter, and the three sat and talked until lunch-time, when Mrs Meredyth said rather uneasily, ‘Has the car not come back yet?’

‘No, and not likely to be here till late this evening. I told Waughope to have tiffin in Kuala, as he has to wait for some repairs to a piece of our machinery which I particularly want back to-night.’

‘Oh dear ; I would not have let Moll go if I had known that!’ cried her mother.

‘Has Moll gone with the car? She’ll be rather bored in Kuala, I should think, for Waughope has a lot of rather uninteresting business to do, and there are only a few Chinese shops for her to look at,’ said Mr Meredyth.

‘She’ll enjoy herself all right. Trust Moll for getting fun out of everything ; besides, it is a pretty drive,’ observed the doctor.

‘But perhaps there is no moon, and it will be dark when they come home,’ said the anxious mother.

‘Waughope would drive a car in the blackest night. Don’t worry, Eulalie. If you like I will telephone to the hotel and tell him not to wait for the repairs, but to bring Moll home first,’ said her husband.

‘I really think it would be better ; she will have had her drive and a long morning in Kuala, and she had much better come home by daylight,’ urged Mrs Meredyth.

‘Very well,’ agreed her husband. Then looking up at the clock, he added, ‘I shall just catch them at tiffin if I ring up the hotel now ;’ and he went to the telephone, where they heard him roaring ; he always shouted at the telephone if he could not make himself understood at once or did not get the answer he wanted.

‘What! Not been there? Yes, my assist-

ant Mr Waughope, and my daughter, a little girl with brown curls. Yes, white, of course. It's Mr Meredyth this end—Bukit Ayer estate. Go and inquire. Thank you. Yes, that's it. They have not come for tiffin yet. Let me know when they arrive, will you? Thank you.'

'They've not gone to tiffin yet. But it's all right; the car's there, so they've arrived all right. I suppose Waughope could not get his business done,' said Mr Meredyth, sitting down comfortably to finish his lunch.

After lunch he was just going to have his lie off, as a siesta is called out East, but his wife stopped him. 'Just ring up Kuala Hotel, Eustace; I cannot make my small voice heard,' she remarked.

'They said they would ring me up when Waughope arrived. I suppose they have forgotten; they must be there by this time,' protested Mr Meredyth, and again they heard him arguing over the telephone.

'What—not been to lunch? You don't mean it? Are you sure? No, there must be some mistake; it's quite impossible!' they heard him say.

The doctor smiled, wondering to himself what impossible thing Moll had managed to accomplish now.

'What is it, Eustace?' inquired his wife.

Mr Meredyth, who had the tube to his ear, replied, 'The manager says Waughope has gone

to Singapore with Moll; but it must be a mistake. I've told them to put me on to the station.'

'Perhaps he found the repairs could not be done in Kuala, and has taken them to Singapore,' suggested the doctor.

'He had no business to do that without my leave.—What is that—the station-master? Have you seen my daughter. Yes, brown curls—and a young man who stammers. What! Are you sure? No, no, it's all right. Thanks—ring off.'—They've gone to Singapore,' he remarked, putting down the receiver and coming to join the other two, who had been listening to this conversation.

'By what train?' asked Mrs Meredyth.

'I never asked, and really, to tell you the truth, I don't want to make any more fuss about it; they'll think Moll has run away or something. I must say I don't understand Waughope; he ought not to have gone without consulting me,' said Mr Meredyth.

Kenneth, who had been out and only arrived now, was told the news, and was as surprised as the others at Waughope's doing such a thing.

'Of course it's the repairs to the machinery; but I wonder at his going right to S'pore and taking Moll with him. Anyhow, he has some good reason, we may be sure,' said Kenneth, who, like his aunt and uncle, and indeed every

one who knew the young assistant, trusted him implicitly.

‘Well, they can’t be home by daylight now, I should think,’ remarked Mr Meredyth; not, however, troubling himself very much about that fact.

‘That depends upon what train they went by,’ argued Kenneth.

‘Your uncle did not ask that. I rather wish I knew. I can’t help thinking that Mr Waughope must have left some message for us which has gone wrong, as things do in this land, with natives of different countries to work them,’ remarked Mrs Meredyth.

‘I’ll tell you what, Aunt Eulalie, I have a good mind to borrow Fish’s motor-bicycle and run over to Kuala. I could make inquiries at the machine-shop and hotel, and find out if there is any message or explanation,’ said Kenneth.

‘I should be so much obliged to you if you would. Of course I know Moll is quite safe with Waughope; still, if you went you could tell them to come straight back when they arrive from Singapore, and not wait about any business,’ said his aunt.

‘All right; I’ll see to any business he has not done, and I’ll telephone any news as soon as I arrive there,’ said Kenneth.

Mr Fish lent his bicycle willingly, remarking as he did so, ‘Fancy Waughope going off

on his own like that? If it had been me, I should have gone to the races.'

'By the way, it is the races to-day. I hope to goodness that it is not there they have gone. It would be just like Moll to do so,' cried Kenneth, as this thought suddenly struck him.

'Yes, but it wouldn't be like Waughope; he disapproves of racing and betting, and he knows that your uncle objects to his assistants going to the races,' said Mr Fish.

'He had an assistant here who made a terrible hash of things by betting, and he lost a lot of money. It has made Uncle Eustace dead against races; but Moll is mad about horses, and she may have persuaded Waughope to take her.'

'It would take her all her time to do that; he didn't want to take her to-day. He said he had a lot of business to do and could not attend to her properly. No, he has gone to Singapore on business and taken Moll with him, because he did not know what to do with her. She'll spend a piping-hot day at the engineering works, which will cure her of going out on business with Waughope,' declared Mr Fish.

Kenneth Meredyth laughed, and went off, after some struggling with the bicycle, which took a good deal of starting.

About an hour afterwards Mr Meredyth was rung up at his office. 'I thought I had better

tell you that Waughope has left the machinery here to be mended, and it is ready for me to bring. He then went off to Singapore by the ten o'clock train without doing any of the other business,' he telephoned.

'What does he mean by it? He must be cracked!' protested Mr Meredyth.

'I don't know; there is no explanation here at the hotel, and the station-master says one of the porters saw them go off, and neither Waughope nor Moll had any tickets, and he seemed to be quarrelling with the young lady.'

'What on earth does it all mean? I had better ring up your aunt,' said Mr Meredyth.

'Hadn't you better wait a bit? The last train is due in an hour; I'll stay for it and 'phone you the meaning of it all,' suggested Kenneth.

'Very well, but your aunt will be getting anxious; I can't understand it at all. I'll be bound it's some prank of Moll's, and she has made poor Waughope go with her. No wonder he scolded her, naughty girl; but I wish he had left some message,' said Mr Meredyth, senior.

Kenneth privately agreed with his uncle, and went off to meet the last train from Singapore, only to find, to his disappointment and concern, that the two wanderers were not in it. For a few moments he stood in Kuala Station, wondering what he was to do, for things were beginning to look serious.

CHAPTER XVII.

OFF TO THE SINGAPORE RACES.

‘I’M afraid you’ll have rather a slow time of it to-day, because I have a lot of important business to do which will take me several hours, and you will have to wait in the hotel,’ announced Mr Waughope, when Moll, breathless but beaming, arrived at the garage where Mr Waughope was just starting the car.

‘I shall come with you; I’d love to see shops again,’ replied Moll.

‘You would not be interested, really; think better of it and stay at home, and I’ll ask if I can take you a drive through some awfully pretty country where there is a very old Portuguese village,’ urged the young man, his hand resting on the door-handle of the car.

‘Not I—“a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.” Thanks to that dear old doctor, mother has let me go out for the day, and I’m going to enjoy myself. We’ll tiffin at the hotel, and I’ll have curry with prawn *sambal* and every other *sambal*.’

‘Get in, then,’ said Mr Waughope; but Moll was not disturbed by his coldness, nor by a look on his face which she knew meant an argument, to put it mildly, over these forbidden dainties.

'I *am* enjoying myself,' she said once or twice as they whizzed along, making a cool breeze as they went, and Mr Waughope could not help being infected by her gaiety, and by the time they got to Kuala he was quite reconciled to having a companion whom he would have to look after when he really had a good deal of troublesome business to get through.

'We'll just see to this machinery first, as it will take a long time to mend; and I want to get home before dark, or else your mother will be getting nervous about you,' he remarked, as he slowed down at the engineer's offices.

'No, she won't, they think you are as safe as old Time; you are worse than any governess,' said Moll.

'I won't be long; just sit there and see that no one runs away with the car,' he remarked, as he told the 'boy' to carry the broken machinery into the shop.

'All right,' said Moll, and her companion knew that the car and its occupant were safe once Moll gave her word.

But many times during that day did he wish he had taken her into the shop with him, for his business took longer than he expected; and Moll was beginning to be bored, when the assistant on another estate near them drove past, and stopped short at sight of Moll.

‘Good-morning, are you going to the races?’ he inquired.

‘Races? What races? Horse-races here to-day? Oh what luck! Yes, of course I’ll come if you’ll take me. Mr Waughope is here on business, and I am out on a day’s holiday, and he was just wondering what he should do with me,’ cried Moll.

For a moment the young man hesitated. Moll looked so eager and bright that he hated to disappoint her; but he doubted whether her parents would approve of her going off to the races at Singapore under his chaperonage. ‘The races are at Singapore; of course I should be delighted to take you, but perhaps your people would not like it. We’d better ask Waughope,’ he replied.

‘They will let me go anywhere with Mr Waughope; he’s like an old grandmother. You must persuade him to come; it’s only two hours’ journey after all,’ urged Moll.

‘Right you are; I’ll just put my car up at the hotel, and you meet me there. We’ll try and fix it up,’ agreed the young man.

‘I’m awfully sorry to have kept you so long; I’m afraid you’ve been terribly bored,’ observed Mr Waughope, when he came out shortly after.

‘I should have been if I hadn’t met Mr Clark. He wants to speak to you at the hotel,’ remarked Moll.

‘All right; we will go straight there and order tiffin, and do our shopping afterwards. I dare say I could take you for a drive round Kuala; there is a lighthouse we might visit, or, if you would like it better, we could have a sail in the Straits. I shall have an hour or two to spare, as this thing won’t be mended till four o’clock,’ he explained.

‘That would be jolly; but Mr Clark has another plan if you approve of it,’ said Moll.

Mr Waughope was flattered, as Moll knew he would be, at having his approval demanded, and he was consequently in a very good temper when at length they arrived at the hotel, only to hear that Mr Clark had gone to the station, where he wanted them to meet him—so the hotel-porter told them—as he wanted to catch the train to Singapore.

‘Rather cool cheek of him to expect me to chase him all over the place; I’ve a good mind not to go. These planters have no manners at all,’ said Mr Waughope, who seemed to forget that he was a planter himself, and only an assistant, as a matter of fact.

‘Oh yes, do go; he wants to see you most particularly, and make haste or the train will go off!’ cried Moll.

Mr Waughope went off rather reluctantly, accompanied by Moll, who, however, stopped and ran back to tell the hotel-porter that he

was to telephone to Bukit Ayer to say that she had gone to the Singapore races, which the man agreed to do, with many polite salaams.

The railway station was quite near, and Moll arrived just in time to hear Mr Waughope saying very decidedly, 'I'm sorry, but we can't possibly come. Good-bye, Clark; I hope you will enjoy yourself.'

'Why can't we go, Mr Waughope? You have just said you had a few hours to spare. Why can't we go into Singapore and see a race? I've never seen a horse-race in my life, and I do love horses,' pleaded Moll.

'Come on, Waughope, be a sport; it's only a couple of hours' run, and you can see the chief races and be back by six o'clock. Come along, and give the kiddie a good time; she must have a pretty rotten one at Bukit Ayer,' urged Mr Clark.

'I am very sorry, Clark, but the thing is impossible. My manager does not approve of his assistants going to the races; besides, I couldn't possibly go in khaki, and Moll is not dressed for Singapore either,' he said stiffly.

'Your manager only objects to his S. D.'s betting; you go and show him that you can go to a race without ruining yourself. As for khaki, who cares about clothes; Moll is all right in that white rig-out. Come along, man!

Here's the train; never mind about a ticket,' said Mr Clark.

'I can't possibly come, and I forbid you to go either, Moll,' declared Mr Waughope.

'Forbid me? What business have you to forbid me? You are just a horrid prig, and don't want me to enjoy myself!' cried Moll, stamping her foot with impatience as the train came in, and she saw her chance of seeing horse-racing disappearing.

'I'm sorry, but the thing is quite impossible,' declared Mr Waughope.

'It is not in the least impossible, and what's more, if you don't go, I will go with Mr Clark,' declared Moll; and so saying, she climbed into the train.

'I think you had better not come if Waughope won't come,' said Mr Clark.

But Moll did not heed him. The station-master gave a whistle, and the train went off as Moll waved gaily to Mr Waughope, who was standing on the platform nonplussed by this last move of Moll's. Then a sudden determination seized him to look after Moll at any cost, and he jumped on to the train as it was going, in spite of energetic protests from porters and officials.

'That's right, Waughope; cheer up, we'll have a jolly day. There are some ripping horses running, and I can give a good tip, if you want one. You back Durbar for all you

are worth ; it's a dead certainty,' said Mr Clark, rattling off his speech, to avert the scolding which he saw Mr Waughope was going to give Moll.

'Thank you, I don't mean to bet to-day, nor am I going to the races ; I am going to take the next train back, and so is Moll. She is under my charge, and she must do what I tell her,' said Mr Waughope coldly.

It was rather late in the day to talk of Moll doing what he told her, seeing that she was now in the train against his express command, and that it was he who was doing what she wished, and it was altogether a rather unwise remark. He might have succeeded in bringing Moll back when they arrived at Singapore if he had appealed to her honour ; but as it was, she resented his dictatorial tone, and only laughed at this speech.

Mr Clark meanwhile, who was out to enjoy himself and did not feel any responsibility as regards Moll beyond a good-natured desire to let her have a good time, and who did not particularly care for Mr Waughope, whom he dubbed goody-goody, and whom he thought it would be rather fun to get into a hole, made himself very entertaining to Moll, and pointed out the various tropical trees and flowers which they passed ; while Mr Waughope sat and glowered at them from his corner.

‘Moll, are you coming home or not?’ he demanded when they reached Tank Road, Singapore.

‘Not!’ said Moll, getting out of the train with a jump.

Mr Waughope said no more; but having paid for their two tickets, he followed her out of the station. After having watched her get into a rickshaw, he followed her and Mr Clark and a stream of rickshaws to the town to Raffles’ Hotel, where there was a special race tiffin and band; but without saying a word.

‘I’ve telephoned to mother from Kuala to say we have gone to the races, so you need not be so glum,’ remarked Moll to him, seeing him make off for the telephone.

Mr Waughope stopped short. ‘Why did you not tell me that before? Did your mother say you might go?’ he asked.

‘No, because I did not wait for the answer. The hotel-porter telephoned for me,’ said Moll.

‘I shall ’phone again, and see what she says,’ he replied stiffly.

But, alas! the ’phone was out of order, and there was no telephonic communication between Kuala and Singapore for the moment; so Mr Waughope sent a telegram, triply paid, urgent, to the hotel at Kuala to explain the whole affair, and resigned himself to the task of following Moll about wherever the spirit (a

most perverse one to-day) chose to lead her, and consoled himself with the thought that at least it was not his fault, and that Mrs Meredith would be assured that he was, in the words of his telegram, 'taking great care of Moll,' though he vowed to himself, at least a dozen times, that a day on the estate would not tire him half so much. However, after a wash, he managed to enjoy the band and the lunch in spite of his khaki; and Moll, whose toilet did not worry her in the least, was in high spirits all tiffin time.

Many were the glances cast at this bright, happy-looking English girl, who was a very rare sight in Singapore, and greatly did the other young bachelors, who swarm in Singapore, envy Mr Waughope and Mr Clark for having such a nice little girl to take to the races, the sight of whom made more than one of them home-sick for their own young sisters.

'Hallo, Waughope, you've come to the races, I see; but, man alive, what do you mean by getting yourself up in khaki? Don't you know that out here it is strict etiquette to wear dark clothes for Singapore, especially for the races and when you have a *mem* with you?' cried a fellow-planter, who caught sight of Mr Waughope and his company, and thought that he, being a new-comer, did not know this fact.

'I am perfectly aware of that, but I did not

mean to come to Singapore races when I started,' said Mr Waughope.

'Oh I see! Well, it doesn't matter, after all, and Clark is smart enough to make up for you. Between you and me I think it's idiotic to put on cloth suits in this climate; it's frightfully hot and uncomfortable. Much more sensible if they'd start wearing white silk or something like that for smart wear. Well, good-bye, I've got a lot of men waiting for me; see you later at the races,' he remarked, going off.

'We had better be off too, as I shall have to get a ladies' pass for Moll, and a ticket for you for the members' stand, Waughope. I suppose you are not a member; I had forgotten about that.'

'No, I am not a member,' said Mr Waughope, as he got into his rickshaw and set off at a rattling pace after his companions, Moll protesting all the time with her rickshaw coolie for going so fast and making himself so hot, which, however, was not of much use, as she talked English, and the Chinaman could not understand a word of any language but his own.

So the three drove up with a flourish at the members' entrance to the Singapore race-course, where poor Mr Waughope was faced with further difficulties and troubles, the tale of which will require another chapter.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MOLL SPENDS A MISCHIEVOUS DAY.

MOLL, with her back to the turnstile, was watching with amusement the stream of motor-cars, *gharries*, private carriages, and, most numerous of all, rickshaws driving up and depositing their freight of every conceivable nation under the sun—Europeans in smart dinner gowns; Malays in European dress, if they were advanced, or in gay *sarongs* and *bajus* (a kind of Magyar jacket coming half-way down to the knees); rich Chinese, with gaudily dressed wives; Japanese, Indian, Javanese, as well as every European nation, were represented there, and more or less on an equality, at all events as far as the private enclosure for members went.

Perhaps the most ardent sportsman there was the sultan of a Malay state, who competed successfully against the horses of Europeans, Chinese, Jews, and Malays. This brilliantly coloured throng engrossed Moll so completely that she was oblivious of a rather heated discussion that was going on behind her, and only turned round when Mr Waughope, looking very angry and Mr Clark very vexed, joined her; and the former said, 'I'm very sorry, Moll, but they have just made an idiotic

new rule that no tickets are to be issued for the members' stand and enclosure, and no ladies' passes given out after twelve o'clock; so I am afraid we must go straight home.'

'I am awfully fed up about it, Moll. I would take you in like a shot; but this stupid secretary declares it's against the rules, and won't let me,' said Mr Clark.

'What a shame! Isn't there any other stand? What is this non-members' stand that those people are going into? Can't we go there?' inquired Moll.

'No one goes there,' objected Mr Clark.

'Indeed they do; let us try,' said Moll.

Mr Clark was too good-natured to refuse, and the three, in spite of remonstrances from Mr Waughope, who was furious at being refused entrance to the proper place, went to the non-members' stand, which Mr Clark observed had only a few 'outsiders.'

'What do the people matter? I haven't come to see the people in the stand; I have come to see the racing, and we can see that quite as well from here as from the members' stand. I am enjoying myself so much!' cried Moll, her eyes shining with excitement.

'It's not the proper place to be,' grumbled Mr Waughope, 'and it all comes of being here without leave. I don't know what the manager will say.'

‘Don’t worry, Mr Waughope; look at the crowd opposite playing football and games just like a lot of children. Isn’t it a pretty sight to see all those colours and those funny little boys in yellow and pink and blue trousers? What are they—Malays or Chinese?’

‘Both, and a lot of them are girls. Both sexes wear trousers in China. It’s rather different from the Derby, isn’t it?’

‘Yes, but here come the horses to be weighed. Oh what a beauty!’ cried Moll.

‘I’m going to bet on him! Will you excuse me?’ cried Mr Clark.

‘Oh put some money on for me! Here is a piece of paper; put it on that horse!’ exclaimed Moll, handing the young man a ten-dollar note.

‘Moll, you are not to bet.—Clark, don’t take the money!’ cried Mr Waughope.

Mr Clark hesitated a moment while Moll and Mr Waughope argued hotly; but he was in a great hurry to be off, so saying, ‘It’s her own money, Waughope; don’t be such an old grandmother,’ and went off with it.

Mr Waughope looked at Moll; but Moll was too excited at the sight of the horses and the whole scene, and he saw that it would be useless to say anything to her; so he sat there gloomily wondering how he should excuse himself for having given way to Moll as he

had done, and feeling more and more uncertain that they would believe it was Moll's doing and not probably his own wish to see the races, which he now remembered having said to Mr Meredyth would be an interesting sight in the brilliant sunshine of Singapore.

But Moll was troubled by no such thoughts, and was watching her horse eagerly. 'There, he's going—head leading! I knew he would. Sultan, you'll win! Oh dear, oh dear, hurry up!' she cried in great excitement.

'Sultan has no chance at all; Merry Widow is going to win this race,' Mr Waughope observed, standing up to get a better view, and finding some satisfaction in giving this gloomy opinion.

'How do you know?' demanded Moll sharply.

'Anybody with half an eye for horses could tell that; he has a better stride, better everything,' replied Mr Waughope, who knew something about horses.

'I think you might have told me, instead of making me waste that money,' said Moll, sitting down abruptly as her horse Sultan cantered in last. Then as Mr Waughope had relapsed into a gloomy silence, she inquired, 'How much was that piece of paper?'

'It looked like a ten-dollar note,' observed Mr Waughope.

‘I mean, how much was it worth in proper money? I don’t know anything about dollars; I only know that cents, which ought to be a penny like it is in France and Germany, is threepence out here; and I can’t possibly calculate dollars.’

‘Eight and a half dollars go to a pound’—— began Mr Waughope; but an exclamation of annoyance from Moll made him pause and ask what was the matter.

‘Are you sure? Then I’ve spent twenty-four shillings about! What a bore! It isn’t mine, and I don’t believe I’ve got as much as that till I get my next allowance,’ she remarked.

Mr Waughope gave Moll a very disapproving look, and said, ‘Nice behaviour yours! Well, it will be a long time before I take you out again. As regards that money, of course I shall pay it; I should not think of allowing a little girl like you to bet, besides its against the rules. Clark ought to be ashamed of himself for encouraging you in such folly.’

Moll, it will be remembered, was very small for fourteen; a fact which annoyed her very much, consequently she greatly resented being called a little girl, as Mr Waughope quite well knew.

‘You won’t pay my bets, and I’m not a

little girl, and I want some tea. As they won't bring it to us here, I shall go down to the tea-room and get it,' announced Moll.

But here Mr Waughope put his foot down. 'There's no tea-room here—only a bar, and go there you shall not, if I have to hold you by force. Now then!'

'Why not?' asked Moll, who saw that he meant what he said.

'Because there are only men there, and it is no place for a lady.'

'Then let us go and ask that soldier at the door where we can get tea; it's past four, and no race for twenty minutes, and I am so thirsty,' urged Moll.

Mr Waughope had no objection to this, and they both went down, only to hear that tea was served on the lawn of the members' enclosure, but nowhere else.

'Then I must go there; I'm thirsty,' announced Moll, joining in the discussion between Mr Waughope and the doorkeeper.

The man looked at her, and said civilly, 'I'm very sorry, miss. Have you a ticket?'

'No, but I must have tea, and if you can't send it to me I must go to it; it's nonsense having a tea-room that you can't go to even if you pay.'

'That's quite true, miss, and you're in the rights of it. As the secretary isn't here, I'll

risk it, and let you through, if this gentleman will take you to the tea-garden.'

'Thank you; I sha'n't do any damage,' said Moll.

'We must just have a cup of tea and get back; it won't do for the secretary to see me in here after he refused me admittance,' said Mr Waughope, looking round nervously.

'Fiddlesticks! he ought to have let us in; there's no hurry, and I want another cup of tea,' said Moll.

'Hallo! How did you get in? I am glad to see you. The secretary thought better of it?' said Mr Clark, coming to their table.

'I thought better of it. I was tired of that stand, and came to this place; it's rather nice. I'm going to stay here.'

'You can't'— began Mr Waughope.

'Yes, she can; old Smith won't say anything if he sees you, and there's a race beginning; come and watch it. Besides, you can't hear the band over in the non-members' stand.'

In the end, Mr Waughope gave way in despair, and they had tea on the lawn, watched two more races, and there was no more talk of leaving the enclosure.

'I lost my bet,' said Moll.

'Oh no, you didn't; I didn't put it on. Here's your ten dollars,' said Mr Clark hastily.

Moll looked at it closely. 'That's not the

same piece of paper. The other was dirtier ; you're only saying that out of politeness.'

'Anyway, I pay my charge's debts,' said Mr Waughope.

'Oh bother debts ! There's an auction of all the racehorses ; let's go and see it,' said Mr Clark, to change the conversation.

Moll was only too pleased ; and though Mr Waughope continued to look uncomfortable at being on forbidden ground, he went with her.

The horses were brought out one by one and walked round the ring, in the foremost of which were Moll and her companions. How it happened no one quite knew ; but one particular horse took Moll's fancy, and she said she should like to buy it, and asked Mr Clark to bid for it. Whether he thought she was the petted daughter of a rich planter who was supplied liberally with pocket-money, and was allowed to do what she liked, or whether, as he afterwards averred, the auctioneer mistook his sign, is not certain ; but what is certain is that at the end of the auction Moll found herself the possessor of a racehorse, which cost the small sum of two hundred dollars, or twenty-four pounds !

It was some time before Mr Waughope grasped this last catastrophe, and when he did his wrath burst forth ; this time on Mr Clark. 'A nice day's work you've done, Clark ! If

we hadn't met you we should never have come here at all; it's been a bad job right through, and this is the end of it. What are we going to do with that ugly brute I should like to know?'

'I'm going to ride it; father said I might have a horse, and this is very cheap, and a racehorse too! I might run it again in some more races and win a lot of money,' cried Moll.

'I never bought him. I wonder if we could get off our bargain. I'll try,' said Mr Clark, going off to interview the authorities.

But they thought the young planter had been playing a trick on them, and disbelieved the story about its being for a girl, and made him abide by his bargain and pay cash down.

This he could only do by Mr Waughope's help, and they finally found themselves the unwilling possessors of a racehorse, and not enough money to pay their fares home.

'Of course I must telephone or wire to Kuala for a friend to meet us there and pay,' said Mr Waughope, who, as it happened, had no acquaintances in Singapore.

'That's all right; I'll get a man I know to lend us money,' said Mr Clark.

This seemed the only thing to do; but unfortunately the friend lived some way off, and by the time they had been to him in rickshaws they had run it very close for the last train at 6.50, and just missed it.

‘Now, Clark, perhaps you’ll tell us what we are to do?’ inquired Mr Waughope, who felt that this was indeed the last straw which broke his back.

‘We must motor across the island [of Singapore] and try and catch the train at Johore,’ said Mr Clark. ‘It’s only seventeen miles.’

‘I doubt if we can race the train,’ demurred Mr Waughope.

‘I’ve done it, only we must hurry up,’ said Mr Clark.

Luckily a car had just come into the garage, and the three set off at a good rate across the island to the railway terminus on the opposite side of the Straits to Johore, where the main line starts up the Malay Peninsula through the Federated Malay States to Penang.

It was a very pretty drive, and Mr Waughope, watch in hand, timed the car, which was going at a high speed on the deserted parts, and found to his relief that they were ahead of the train at the crossing half-way.

‘We shall do it,’ he said.

‘Easily,’ said Mr Clark, ‘and, after all, it is not much more expensive, only ten dollars instead of three, and a much more pleasant way of travelling. Oh-h!’

This was owing to a violent explosion, which meant a tire burst.

‘Ten minutes lost!’ groaned Mr Waughope.

‘Only three.—Hurry up, chauffeur; another five dollars if you catch the boat across the Straits.’

In five minutes they were on again; but, alas! the extra bribe meant haste along a serpentine bit of road, and a grazing against a tree nearly upset the car but for a miracle, and the chauffeur stopped to examine the damage. There was no serious harm done, but they arrived at the Straits to see the steamboat which connects with the train half-way across.

‘A *sampan*—get a *sampan*!’ shouted Mr Clark. But, alas! as the *sampan* neared the shores of Johore, the train puffed out of Johore Bham station and up the mainland.

CHAPTER XIX.

MOLL DISAPPEARS IN A YELLOW CAR.

AT last, if he had but known it, Moll's much-tried guardian had his revenge; for his young charge—and a heavy charge he found her—was really disturbed, for they were now about one hundred miles from Kuala by the road, which wound about far more than the railway, and then there were twenty miles more to go to Bukit Ayer, and it was now eight o'clock, and quite dark.

'The mischief!' muttered Mr Clark, looking helplessly after the retreating train.

'There's no other train, I suppose—not even a goods?' inquired Mr Waughope of the black stationmaster.

'Oh yes, to-morrow morning at eight o'clock, and there is an hotel very good here, like at Singapore; you can stay there,' he replied.

'I must 'phone to Meredyth and ask what I am to do. I suppose this 'phone is all right?' said Mr Waughope.

'I do not think so, sir; there has been a bad storm here to-day, and no wires are in order since this morning,' replied the man.

'What! no communication since this morning? Then what about a telegram sent from Singapore at one o'clock? Wouldn't that

arrive all right?' asked Mr Waughope, suddenly bethinking himself of his last telegram.

'Oh yes, that would arrive here all right,' the stationmaster told him.

'But to Kuala, man!' cried Mr Clark, who was beginning to wish he had never met Moll and her companion, or at least had not incited the former to break bounds as he had done.

'No telegrams have gone through to Kuala. I will ask if there are any for you, if you wish.'

They gave him up as hopeless. As for a special, it was out of the question, as there was no engine there at the moment, and no one to drive it if there had been; nor was there such a thing as a motor for hire.

'I'm awfully sorry, Waughope, upon my word I am; but no one could foresee such bad luck,' said Mr Clark.

'Yes, they could, if they knew Moll Meredith; she's a regular madcap, and I ought to have pulled her out of the train at Kuala. I shall get the sack for a certainty,' said Mr Waughope, full of gloom.

'Where is the young one?' inquired Mr Clark, looking round.

Mr Waughope groaned. 'Lost, I suppose,' he replied.

'I wonder you ever took her out for the day; it's more than I would do. I shouldn't

wonder if I get into no end of a row from my manager for buying that miserable brute of a horse; for I suppose they'll say I bought it,' said Mr Clark, which was rather mean of him, considering his share in the day's doings.

'It's no use abusing her now; she is nice enough, and a jolly companion except when she behaves as she has to-day, and the thing to do at this moment is to find her, or goodness knows what she may be at,' said Mr Waughope, hurrying out of the station.

There was no sign of her in the station-yard, which was full of coolies and rickshaws, the lights of which cast a glow upon the shining skins of their runners and upon the ground.

'I say, that's not her going round the corner in that motor?' said Mr Clark, pointing to a motor which was just disappearing round the coolie lines.

'No, of course not; it's a private car. How on earth could she go off in a stranger's motor-car? She doesn't know any one in Johore.'

'There may be a planter down here with his car who has taken her off to the hotel. I think she is a little upset about missing this train, and if she has met some friends I expect she'd rather stay at the hotel with them if there is a lady there,' suggested Mr Clark.

'Whose car is that, stationmaster?' inquired Mr Waughope, half-inclined to hope Mr Clark

was right, and that Moll had found a chaperon to relieve him.

‘That, sir? That yellow car, do you mean?’ asked the man.

‘Yes, of course; there was only one car here, wasn’t there?’

‘Oh that belongs to a Towkay, a rich Chinaman of Singapore; he’s going up to an estate he has in the Malay States,’ said the stationmaster, who knew every one and every one’s business.

‘That settles it; it can’t have been Moll in that car,’ said Mr Waughope.

‘No, of course not, but I could have vowed that was her *topee*,’ observed Mr Clark.

‘Every one wears a *topee* here,’ said Mr Waughope.

‘Y-es—but—every one hasn’t brown curls,’ said Mr Clark in a meaning tone.

‘It can’t have been her,’ said Mr Waughope; but the other knew by his tone that he was saying this to convince himself.

‘Well, then, where is she?’ demanded Mr Clark impatiently.

‘Are the gentlemen looking for the young *mem*?’ inquired the stationmaster, who had been listening to their conversation, and on being told, he said, ‘The young *mem* is gone in the yellow car.’

‘You idiot! Why couldn’t you have told

us that before? Where has she gone? I mean where does this Chinaman live?' cried Mr Waughope, stammering in his excitement.

'In Singapore, *sahib*,' said the man.

'I know that. I mean, where does he stay in Johore—at the hotel?'

'Yes, he stayed there last night, if he has not started on his tour,' explained the man.

'Come on, Clark; don't let's wait to hear that man drawling stupid suggestions. They're enough to drive one wild these Asiatics, one and all. Let's go to the hotel, and hope to goodness that they have not gone yet,' said Mr Waughope.

'Hold hard, Waughope; let's get rickshaws. No one ever walks out here; it's bad form. Don't lose your head; she's at the hotel all right. Why on earth should she go off with an old Chinese Towkay? She's not quite mad!' cried Mr Clark.

Mr Waughope let himself be persuaded to get into a rickshaw, though the hotel was almost in sight—first, in his hurry, wanting to get into Mr Clark's rickshaw, to which the latter objected as looking mean and uncomfortable. But on arrival at the hotel no yellow car was to be seen, and the Englishmen in the porch declared that no car and no English *mem*, young or old, had been there that evening.

Mr Waughope walked through the group of Englishmen with such a white face that one of them, looking at him as he sat with his head in his hands at one of the tables of the dining-room, asked, 'Fever?'

'No, it's—I say, you fellows, we've lost a girl,' said Mr Clark in desperation.

Every man was up in a moment. 'A girl? How? Has she run away, or what?' they asked.

'I don't know; it's a young girl—a child, in fact. She's off on the spree, I suppose, in an old Chinaman's car; she a schoolgirl, only out from home a few months.'

'You don't mean Meredyth's daughter? I heard she had come out. I say, we'll do all we can; let's start a search-party—not the first for her, eh? She's rather a madcap, isn't she?' said one of them with a laugh at the recollection of the tales he had heard of Moll at Bukit Ayer.

'It's no laughing matter; the young one may want a lark; but she does not know the country, or she wouldn't go off for a spin with an old Chinaman,' said one of the men.

'There's the old Chinaman who owns the car!' cried one of the young men suddenly, pointing to a good-natured-looking old man in gorgeous garments who passed under the street lamp in a rickshaw.



'Poleese! No, I will not go to poleese.'

'What has he done with her?' gasped Mr Clark.

'Go after him and ask him,' suggested the other.

'Here, Waughope, here's the Chinaman who has carried off Moll!' cried Mr Clark, going into the dining-room.

Mr Waughope was up and out of the hotel in a moment, and following the Chinaman, whom at last they persuaded to stop, to his great indignation, which increased tenfold at their clamour to know what he had done with the little English girl, whom he was ordered to produce at once or go to prison.

'I not know any English *mem.* I one honourable Chinaman; I not go prison; I put you prison, you bad men!' screamed the man.

But Mr Waughope was determined to keep hold of him until he gave Moll up, his denials of any knowledge of her notwithstanding.

'Here, Towkay, come to the police-station and have it out,' suggested Mr Clark in conciliatory tones.

'Poleese! No, I will not go to poleese,' and making a flying leap out of his rickshaw with wonderful agility for so old and stout a man, he fled in the opposite direction, which happened to be towards the hotel, into which he ran as a possible haven of refuge, where

at least he would find Englishmen less mad and more just than these.

Fortunately he happened to be known there, and one of the habitués of the hotel exclaimed, 'Why, you've got Chop Lee Wing. This isn't the owner of the yellow motor-car; this is a shopkeeper here. You've got hold of the wrong man!'

Mr Waughope by this time was completely beside himself. 'She was like my own little sister, and an awfully good sort, really—only rather full of fun. I say, you fellows, I don't know you, but you are English, help me to find her.' He appealed to the group who were sitting having iced drinks in the hotel vestibule.

The men were more moved than they cared to say, and one, slapping him on the back, said, 'Cheer up, man! we'll find her if she's in Johore, and be after her in no time if she isn't. Wilkins here will lend his car, and it's the swiftest in the state.'

'Rather; get into her now, and go to the police-station. A yellow car is easily—Hi, ho! stop it!' he shouted as a yellow car appeared, and at their shouts made for the hotel.

'Let me get at him—I'll choke the life out of him!' cried Mr Waughope violently, as he saw the car with a young man driving, and in the back seat was Moll.

‘Shut up!—Hold him some one.—That’s not the owner; that’s his chauffeur—an Englishman—Waughope. Easy there! Listen to reason, man. There’s some mistake; this young fellow is as decent a man as you’ll find anywhere. He often comes over from Singapore.’

Mr Waughope, who had been kept by main force in the background by the other Englishmen, was not visible when Moll jumped out of the car; but Mr Clark came forward, and Moll, glad to see a familiar face, called out, ‘There you are! Where’s Mr Waughope? I’ve been looking for you everywhere.’

‘Oh have you?’ said Mr Clark sarcastically. ‘Funny way to look for any one going off with Chinamen!’

‘Chinamen! What silly nonsense are you talking? I went with Charles. Where’s Mr Waughope,’ said Moll.

She looked so childish and so happy about something that even Mr Clark could not be very angry with her, though he said severely, ‘Waughope’s gone off his head or thereabouts with worry over you. And who is this Charles, pray?’

‘That has nothing to do with you; I am under Mr Waughope’s care. Take me to him,’ said Moll with dignity.

The men, who were interested listeners to

this conversation, though they pretended not to hear anything, smiled at this speech.

‘Oh! are you under my care? Well, it’s for the last time, and so I tell you. Now you’d better go to bed; I’ll tell them to show you to a bedroom,’ said Mr Waughope.

‘No need for that; my wife will put her up,’ said Mr Wilkins promptly.

‘Thank you very much, but Charles is going to take me home,’ said Moll, smiling at him.

‘No, I’m hanged if he shall!’ cried Mr Waughope, starting forward and seizing Moll’s wrist in a grasp which made her wince. ‘You’re in my charge, as you say, and though I’ve made a pretty bad mess of it, I’ll see you home myself to-morrow morning.’

‘But mother will be frightened; let us go to-night. Don’t hold my wrist like that—you hurt; I won’t run away!’ cried Moll.

‘I’ll take you home, sir, if you’ll let me; I know the road well. The master has kindly lent his car to Miss Moll, when I told him who she was and how you’d missed the train,’ said the chauffeur, politely touching his hat to Mr Waughope.

The latter stared at him in amazement. ‘Who—who on earth are you?’ he spluttered.

‘Charles Jackson, sir. I was Mr Kenneth Meredyth’s chauffeur for three years, and many’s the time I’ve driven Miss Moll out

when she was at school there,' explained the man.

'Oh!' said Mr Waughope, too much taken aback to say anything else.

'Hurrah! All's well that ends well. If this chap will take us to Bukit Ayer to-night so much the better,' cried Mr Clark, jubilant.

'Can you do it really?' asked Mr Waughope.

'I'll have you there by eleven o'clock; the road will be clear, and it's only ninety miles if I take a cross-cut, and the car goes like greased lightning when I let her,' said the chauffeur.

'Then let's have a drink to celebrate the happy ending, and start,' said Mr Clark.

'It is not ended yet, and, if you'll excuse me, I think we'd better be off,' said Mr Waughope. 'But I am most awfully obliged to you fellows for your sympathy, and so will Mr and Mrs Meredyth be,' he said.

'Yes, get off sharp, and good-luck to you, and next time you miss the train come straight to my bungalow,' Mr Wilkins remarked. That was the last they heard.

'I can't imagine what on earth you wanted sympathy for!' exclaimed Moll when they were off.

'Very likely not,' said Mr Waughope, as he leant back in a corner of the car.

Moll climbed in beside Charles, and had

turned to make this remark ; but seeing that the two young men seemed sleepy and disinclined for conversation, she confined her remarks and inquiries as to how Charles liked his new employment ; and in talks about her aunt and uncle and old times, the three hours passed very pleasantly for her.

CHAPTER XX.

MR WAUGHOPÉ'S OPINION OF MOLL.

AT the same time that Mr Waughope and Mr Clark, with mingled feelings of relief and depression, leant back in their separate corners, wishing they were safely home and their reception by Mr and Mrs Meredyth safely over, Kenneth Meredyth was standing in Kuala Station in a state of uncertainty as to what was the best thing to do. If he 'phoned to Mr Meredyth that Moll had not come by the last train, Mrs Meredyth would be in a great state of alarm, and as she was far from strong, Kenneth was anxious to avoid this. There was no chance of telephoning to Singapore, owing to the violent storm there had been about half-way between Kuala and Johore, and he would not have known where to telephone even if the communication had not been broken. Slowly and with bent head he strolled back to the hotel and ordered dinner. After all, nothing was to be gained by starving himself, and some time he had to eat.

The manager, who was a planter himself and a gentleman, looked at him for some time, and at last, coming across, joined him. 'What's up, Mr Meredyth? Has your little sister lost the last train?'

Kenneth nodded, not troubling to explain that Moll was his cousin.

'That's a nuisance; but it's always a rush to get back by that train after the races if you wait to the end,' he observed.

'I don't know that they have gone there,' observed Kenneth.

'Didn't you get the message then? Miss Meredyth left it with the hall-porter, and said she hoped they would not mind, but she was going to the Singapore races, and should be quite safe with Mr Waughope; but if they objected they were to telephone to the station at Singapore and stop them, and she'd come back at once, although she hoped they would let her go.'

Kenneth dropped his knife and fork. 'Just like her! I tell you, Wilson, girls are more bother than they are worth out here; they have nothing to do like us men, and get tired of the jungle and look round for some amusement,' he grumbled.

'And you can't blame them, especially when they have no companions. I hope they won't scold her when she gets home, for she did look so delighted at the thought of going to the races, and it's a pretty enough sight too, though I should not have thought young Waughope was game for any such sport,' he remarked.

Kenneth could not help smiling. 'He wasn't, but there's no holding Moll—she is a regular madcap—when she has set her mind on anything. Anyway, I'm glad she had the decency to send that message; though it never got there, worse luck, or she certainly would have been stopped at Singapore Station,' he explained.

'She doesn't know the ways of this country, or she certainly would have given the message to a European. However, the nuisance is that they've lost the train, and there's nothing to do but wait till to-morrow morning, and meet her by the first train.'

'Yes, I'll send Moll's message—better late than never,' said Kenneth; and then it occurred to him to delay the news of Moll having missed the train until he could go home and explain it himself, and perhaps soften the news to his aunt; besides, as he argued with himself, the later she got the news the shorter time she would have to worry until next morning. As Moll could not be back until half-past nine at earliest, and he would be back at eleven o'clock, he decided that it would be quite time enough to tell her then; so he just 'phoned to say that Moll had, after all, left a message which had not been delivered.

Mr Meredyth was all good-humour again. 'Ah, I thought it was all right! Good girl

to ask leave. Of course if we had got the message I would have stopped her; but, as it is, it can't be helped, and, after all, this fling will keep her quiet for a bit. All right, Ken,' shouted his uncle through the telephone.

It was now half-past nine, and if Mr Meredyth had been a less careless man he would have calculated that the train must have come in, and have asked where Moll was; but, as it was, he forgot, and it was Mrs Meredyth who reminded him of this fact and made him ring Kenneth up again. But this time it was the manager who answered, and he informed them that Kenneth had started for home. The manager also carefully abstained from mentioning that Moll had missed the train, so her parents, concluding that Moll was with Kenneth, waited her coming with patience.

Mr Fish, who was lying in his chair, came out and asked for news anxiously.

'She's gone to the races and missed the train,' said Kenneth.

'Waughopé's an owl! Fancy not being able to manage a chit like that! He ought to have made her catch the train. It's stupid enough to have taken her to Singapore, but I did think he had more backbone than to be led by the nose like that,' said Mr Fish indignantly.

'Well, here's your bicycle returned with

thanks, as the saying is, and I must be off to break the news to my aunt and uncle,' said Kenneth.

'Hallo! who is that motoring so late?' exclaimed Mr Fish, as the hooting of a car was heard along the main road.

'I don't know. It's a strange car; I don't know the sound of it at all,' replied Kenneth.

There were not a dozen cars all along this the one main road across this part of the peninsula, and not only their owners but their hooters were well known to all the planters, so the two stood and listened out of curiosity to this new car, and wondered what it could be doing at this time of night, and where it was going when, to their surprise, it turned in at the entrance to the Bukit Ayer plantation, and stopped at the turning to their bungalow. A minute later, Mr Waughope, looking very tired and gloomy, walked up the steps on to the veranda, and said, 'I say, is there any *makan* left? I've had no dinner, and I'm frightfully hungry.'

'Where's Moll?' cried the other two in chorus.

'Don't bother,' said Mr Waughope sullenly, going to the back of the veranda to shout to the 'boy' for food.

Kenneth and Mr Fish looked at each other in amazement and consternation. That Mr

Waughope should be cross, they understood ; but that he should arrive in a strange car alone—it had not occurred to them that Moll had naturally gone to the manager's bungalow—was alarming, and they thought some dreadful catastrophe had taken place.

Mr Fish, who was very kind-hearted, followed him into his room. 'Look here, Waughope, we're awfully sorry for you, but hadn't you better go up to the manager and have it out with him?' he said.

Poor Mr Waughope, who thought this meant, as he had feared, that Mr Meredyth suspected him of having secretly wished to go to the races himself, and had made an easy cat's-paw of Moll, and was very angry with him, replied, 'I simply can't stand any more to-day, Fish; I'm regularly done up. I'm going to send in my resignation in the morning; it'll save him chucking me out.'

'Oh perhaps it will not be so bad as that. What happened?'

'I'll tell you to-morrow; I'm going to bed now. I don't want any *makan*, after all,' declared Mr Waughope.

'But I say, man, you must think of Moll,' protested Mr Fish.

'Must I? Why must I, pray? I never undertook to do nursemaid, did I? I came out here to be a planter, not to look after

madcap schoolgirls !' burst forth Mr Waughope, at the end of his patience.

Kenneth, finding there was nothing to be got out of Mr Waughope but this sort of talk, which might relieve his own feelings, but did not relieve their anxiety, went off home, and Mr Fish also left his fellow-assistant to his own devices, which seemed, by the sounds issuing from his room, to consist in further relieving his feelings by throwing the contents of the room about.

However, after a time he calmed down, and Mr Fish was just going to ask him to come and have some *makan*, when Moll's voice was heard in the garden, saying, 'Mr Waughope—Mr Waughope, I want to speak to you !'

'Go away—go away home at once, do you hear! How dare you come here disturbing me at this time of night? You are a badly behaved little girl. I don't want to speak to you to-night; you've done enough mischief as it is!' cried Mr Waughope from his window, or, as Moll put it, the open space in the plank wall.

'Come, come, Waughope, I know she has been very naughty to-day, but she has come to make it up,' said the manager's voice.

Mr Waughope gasped, and then coming out, said, 'I beg your pardon, sir; I'm very sorry for my rudeness to Moll, and for all

to-day's business; it sha'n't occur again,' he stammered.

'No, that it shall not, and as for being sorry, from all accounts you are the only one who is not to blame, and Clark is so penitent that I suppose we must forgive him. After all, there's no harm done, and you've seen the races, which you said would be a pretty sight,' said the manager slyly.

Mr Waughope smiled sheepishly, and avoided looking at Moll, who was beaming, and looked as bright and fresh as if she had just got up, instead of having had a tiring and eventful day.

'It's very kind of you to take it like this, sir; I feel I ought to have been firmer'— Here Moll laughed, whereupon Mr Waughope gave her what he meant to be a withering glance, and subsided into silence.

'All's well that ends well,' replied Mr Meredyth, echoing Mr Clark's words, and adding, 'and it's an ill wind that blows no one any good. I've probably found a new chauffeur, who has already served the family faithfully, for this man is leaving his present employment. I think I shall take him on.'

Moll meanwhile was giving Mr Fish a graphic account of her day's outing, over which he was chuckling till it came to the scene between the two Englishmen and the

Chinaman, which made him laugh so immoderately that Mr Meredyth demanded an explanation of their merriment, in which he joined on being told.

'Well, there's one thing, it shows that Englishmen can be trusted anywhere to protect a woman, however trying and naughty she may be.—Good-night, Waughope; you are a good fellow, and I'm much obliged to you for your goodness to my little girl,' said the manager, putting out his hand and shaking that of his assistant heartily.

'Good-night, Mr Waughope. Thank you for taking me to the races; I have enjoyed myself immensely; we'll have another nice long day together soon,' said Moll, putting out her hand.

Mr Waughope looked at it as if it were something dangerous; but seeing no way of escape, he just touched it. Her remark, which he felt added insult to injury, he treated with the silent contempt it deserved.

'And now, having unnecessarily smashed up all the furniture in your room and given way to your nasty temper, perhaps you will come and have your *makan*, which must be cold by now,' said Mr Fish dryly.

'I'm sorry if I disturbed you'—Mr Fish raised his eyebrows, as if to say that that was putting it mildly—'but upon my word, Fish,

I've had a day of it, I have indeed,' said Mr Waughope.

'You seem to have had. I wish I had been in your place, I should have enjoyed it; whereas it seems to have been wasted on you. But, if you'll excuse my saying so, I wonder you let that girl take you here, there, and everywhere at her own sweet will; I'd have seen her farther before she took me to Singapore or anywhere else against my will,' said Mr Fish.

'I bet you what you like if you went out for the day you'd do no better,' said Mr Waughope, who was only speaking figuratively, not being, as has been said, a betting man.

But Mr Fish took him up. 'Done, for an even five dollars, that I take Moll out and make her do what she is told the whole time,' said Mr Fish.

'I don't bet; but I will give you a present of five dollars if you do,' said Mr Waughope.

Mr Fish laughed at this way of reconciling betting with his conscience, and said, 'All right, that's fixed up, and I'll give you five dollars *as a present* if Moll makes me do a single thing I don't want, or does anything I don't wish her to do; and as you are evidently not on terms with her for the present, she is sure to fall back upon me for a companion, Ken not

being too obliging in that matter. Then I will fix up what the programme of the day is to be, and stick to it.'

Mr Waughope, whose spirits were higher than usual as a reaction after the anxieties of the day, agreed laughingly, and made plans for laying out his present to the best advantage, hovering finally between a safety-razor and a rattan chair for his room; while Mr Fish retaliated by deciding to spend his 'bet' on cigars; till, tired out, they both bethought themselves that they had to be up by half-past five next morning for six o'clock muster, and went off to bed.

CHAPTER XXI.

A MALAY KAMPONG (VILLAGE).

‘COMING to tennis, Waughope?’ inquired Mr Fish, the day after the Singapore races.

‘Not to-day, thank you,’ replied Mr Waughope, who was buried behind a newspaper on his long chair.

‘Sounds as if I were a baker calling for orders. What are you so slack for? Oh I forgot; you are resting after your arduous labours yesterday in the taming of the shrew. Well, never mind that; bury the hatchet and come on, old man; we can’t make a foursome without you—you know that. Don’t be selfish,’ urged Mr Fish.

But all his persuasion was wasted upon Mr Waughope, who remained unmoved by it, and seemed to be greatly interested in the Straits newspaper, which he generally accused of only having unimportant local news of no interest to an Englishman just from home, and only said, ‘Can’t help that; play single with Ken; or if she wants to play, get Meredyth to make a fourth.’

Mr Fish regarded him doubtfully for a moment, and then said, ‘She’s the cat’s aunt; you talk about our having jungle manners; it

strikes me you've caught them. Meredyth won't play, as you very well know; it gives him prickly heat, or he says it does, which comes very much to the same thing. All right, I know what I'll do. I'll take Moll to see that pretty little Malay village at the twenty-third mile; she wants to see real Malays at home, and I shall kill two birds with one stone—three, in fact, for I pass through that rubber nursery I've got to visit for my report, give Moll a walk, and—win my bet. Get out your five-dollar note, Waughope.'

'I have made no bet,' began Mr Waughope, sitting up, preparatory to arguing this matter with Mr Fish.

'Oh dry up; what's in a name? I sha'n't let you off, so you can give me the five dollars now if you like,' said the other.

But as Mr Waughope gave no signs of giving him his present or his bet, Mr Fish, with a laugh, went off.

Moll was sitting in a hammock swinging her feet disconsolately, for she had been left very much to herself by her mother, and at Mr Fish's proposal she brightened up considerably. 'I thought you had all had enough of me; Kenneth said you would give me a wide berth,' she observed, as she went to ask her mother if she might go to the Malay *kampung* (village).

‘Where is this *kampong*, Mr Fish? Are you sure there is no infectious illness there? And are you prepared to take charge of Moll?’ inquired Mrs Meredyth.

‘I’ll take charge of her with pleasure, Mrs Meredyth; it is only to the *kampong* at the twenty-third mile, just through the rubber plantation and a bit of jungle. There are no possible dangers there, and as for illnesses, there are generally some. We’ve got most illnesses on the estate in our own lines, if you come to that; but I’ll make inquiries before we go near the people,’ said Mr Fish.

‘Then I shall be very much obliged to you if you will take Moll for a walk; I think we ladies stay in too much, and are less well than our menkind in consequence. I would come myself, but I am not strong enough now,’ replied Mrs Meredyth.

Mr Fish did not say what he thought, which was that Mrs Meredyth was very far from well or strong, and wanted a holiday home badly, and he wondered, not for the first time, that her devoted husband and daughter did not see this. However, it was none of his business, and he and Moll started off in excellent spirits, for he was a very light-hearted, entertaining young man, and very kind-hearted when it did not cost him too much trouble.

‘I can’t imagine why people out here never

walk. In Singapore you never saw a single white person walking; they all go about in rickshaws or carriages, and I do think it looks so silly for great strong men to go about in rickshaws. Kenneth had a weak-looking little woman to pull him, and when I told him it was disgraceful, he said, "Nonsense!" and called her "Piggie." It just shows how people get corrupted in the East,' announced Moll, as she walked over the clearing to the rubber plantation with a quick, light step which was not usual in the East, and not Mr Fish's accustomed pace, as he promptly told her.

'Never mind; it will do you good to go faster for once. I feel too excited at getting out of that bungalow, where there's nothing to do,' replied Moll.

Mr Fish laughed good-humouredly, and kept pace with Moll, as he replied to her last remark. 'It was a man, women never drag rickshaws; and do you mean to say that you don't know what *pegi* means in Malay? It's simply "drive on," or "go on."'

'Then you ought to use another word; it sounds horrid!' put in Moll.

Mr Fish ignored this suggestion, and continued, 'In fact, you are an example of the traveller who comes out, sees all sorts of wrongs, and goes home and relates them to every one who knows as little as himself about the matter,

or, worse still, writes it, instead of asking for information from people who do know.'

'I know a great deal. What have I said that was not true?' demanded Moll. 'Oh I don't mean *that* "piggie" which may be spelt "p-e-g-i," but is pronounced "piggie," which it ought not to be. But isn't it true that no white man ever walks anywhere that there is a road where a carriage or rickshaw can go?'

'That is quite true and quite right. In the first place, if you do walk you would look as if you had been having a Turkish bath, which is not the thing in a town; and in the second place, you must keep up the prestige of the European. Only natives walk; white men ride. But they don't let women drive them; so, pray, don't go home and say that,' protested Mr Fish.

'Don't you call Chinese women women?' asked Moll.

'Not when they are men, which they always are when they are pulling rickshaws,' declared Mr Fish.

'But I'm sure Ken's rickshaw-puller was a woman; she had a woman's face and a big chignon like a woman, and they all wear trousers, which was the only thing about her that was like a man,' argued Moll.

'I can't help that; she was a man—I mean he was. That man has a womanish face, I

admit, but he's a man for all that,' observed Mr Fish, pointing out a gentle-faced Chinaman who was coming towards them.

'I don't believe it; you ask him,' said Moll.

'I fancy I see myself,' laughed Mr Fish, shaking his head.

'Yes, do; I sha'n't believe it unless you do,' and she stopped the man by using one of the few Malay words she knew.

'He'll think I'm mad!' objected Mr Fish; but being an easy-going man, to get rid of the Chinaman he asked him his name and if he had a wife. 'He says his name is Bo Lui, and he has a wife in China. Will that satisfy you?' he asked Moll.

'Oh well, it's very puzzling, and they are a very ugly nation. What is this stick so prettily marked?' she inquired, stooping to pick up what looked like a striped piece of wood to Moll's inexperienced eyes.

'Don't touch it!' cried Mr Fish.

But Moll did, and to her surprise, and, it must be owned, alarm, the thing raised its head to strike at her, when Mr Fish swung his stick down on its head and killed it.

'Goodness! was that a snake?' cried Moll.

'No, it was a piece of wood, which in the East has a head and glides about and bites you,' said Mr Fish with a twinkle in his eye.

‘Perhaps you had better go first along this narrow path ; I don’t want to be bitten by a snake,’ suggested Moll, stepping back, and taking no notice of Mr Fish’s sarcasm.

‘That’s the usual way out here, and much safer ; Malays always walk so—Indian file they call it, the man first and the woman behind in proper subjection ; it saves a lot of trouble.’

It was an unwise remark, as Mr Fish might have known, for Moll sprang through the tall lalang and bushes bordering the path, and took her place in front of her guide. ‘As I am not a savage woman, thank goodness, whatever you may be, I shall walk in front like a free and independent English girl,’ she announced.

‘I hope you are independent enough to kill any snakes you may happen to tread upon before they bite you,’ remarked her companion.

Moll took no notice ; but Mr Fish observed with secret amusement that she gathered her skirts round her, and kept a sharp lookout for prettily marked sticks, with the result that she never noticed the gathering clouds, and was surprised when Mr Fish, looking up, said, ‘I am very much afraid we must turn back ; there is a storm over there, and I fancy it is coming our way.’

‘Oh bother the storm ! we can take shelter under these trees if it rains,’ urged Moll.

‘Not much ! A man was killed along this

road not two miles from this spot—he and his horse. He was driving a *gharry*, and he left his fare in the *gharry* and went and stood under a tree, and was struck by lightning,' related Mr Fish.

'Well, that's the *kampong* over there, isn't it? We shall be there in less than half-an-hour, and it won't rain before then,' argued Moll.

'A wilful woman must have her way; but if it does rain we shall get wet going home, and your muslin dress won't be much protection,' he replied, going on.

They were still a few minutes from the *kampong* when it began to rain, and Moll started to run.

'Don't run, child; you'll get hot!' cried Mr Fish.

But Moll only laughed, and said, 'I don't mind;' and Mr Fish, following her more slowly, saw her disappear into a cocoa-nut plantation, whereupon he quickened his steps in time to see her running up the steps into a Malay house, where the woman immediately brought a cocoa-nut mat, evidently a new one, for her to sit upon.

'I got in just in time,' cried Moll, looking very pleased with herself, in spite of the perspiration which ran down her face in great drops, laughing as she wiped them away.

‘Awfully foolish thing to do; just the way to get a chill and fever,’ grumbled Mr Fish.

‘You are always talking about fever out here, and dosing yourselves with quinine. I believe you frighten yourselves into it half your time,’ said Moll, squatting on the mat, and beaming at the Malay family which was squatted at a polite distance from her at the door of the inner room.

‘I am thirsty; I think I must have a drink. Aren’t you thirsty?’ he inquired of Moll.

‘Yes, but mother has forbidden me to drink water except from our filter, and I don’t suppose these people have soda-water or “tonic”’ (the great aerated-water drink in the East, being lemonade with a little quinine in it).

‘We can have a cocoa-nut, if you like, if you don’t mind drinking it out of a hole in the nut,’ suggested Mr Fish.

‘I never thought of that. I don’t mind how I drink it, if you don’t mind seeing me spill it all down my dress, as I shall be sure to do,’ said Moll.

However, they were evidently rich Malays, for the husband, having run up a tree and brought down a couple of cocoa-nuts in their green covering, fetched a bright, clean brass tray with two glasses on it, so that they drank their cocoa-nut drink ‘in style,’ as Moll observed.

The Malay woman watched her with interest, as she smoked cigarette after cigarette alternately with something out of a little oblong brass dish, which for her part interested Moll quite as much. First she took a long green leaf, which she smeared with a white powder, lime as a matter of fact, and then she took a betel-nut, cut off a bit with a sharp pair of pliers, not like anything Moll had ever seen before, and this she wrapped in a leaf and chewed in her mouth, turning her lips and gums a bright red and her teeth black.

‘Come, Moll, the shower is over,’ said Mr Fish.

‘Wait a little longer; I’m frightfully hot,’ said Moll, who was amusing herself with a Malay baby of eight months old, with big black eyes and clear yellow complexion, and dressed in a printed cotton jacket and tiny green trousers.

It took Mr Fish some minutes to induce Moll to come away, which he was anxious to do, as he was afraid of her catching cold sitting in a draught when she was so hot.

At last, with a sigh of regret, Moll got up and went, after having given each of the children ten cents (threepenny-bit in English), which Mr Fish assured her would be a fortune for them.

‘I *have* enjoyed myself; it’s so jolly seeing

quite new things, and those little Malay children are so pretty and polite,' said Moll.

'H'm, more than your dress will be when you get home; I'm drenched to the skin, and I should think you are too,' remarked Mr Fish as they struggled along the jungle path, which was now mostly under water, to say nothing of the lalang and shrubs that they brushed against.

Moll's skirt clung round her like a wet sheet, but she stoutly denied being at all uncomfortable.

Mrs Meredyth looked a little anxious at sight of them. 'I was afraid you would be caught in the rain. Never mind; Moll must have a hot bath, and I won't ask you in, Mr Fish, because you must go home and do the same,' she declared.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN EXCITING CHASE.

‘HOT water, “boy,” and plenty of it!’ shouted Mr Fish as he ran up the steps of the veranda two at a time into his bungalow.

‘I say, you are a drowned rat! Where on earth have you been?’ cried Mr Waughope as his colleague walked through the veranda to his room, dripping as he walked, and making a wet footprint and swishing sound from the water which filled his boots.

‘To the Malay *kampong*. The jungle was a perfect swamp coming back after the storm. You had rain here, I suppose?’ observed Mr Fish.

‘Yes, I should have thought it would have been threatening enough to stop your going to that village; Moll must have got wet through. Why didn’t you turn back?’ inquired Mr Waughope, with some meaning.

‘Why, oh why?’ sang Mr Fish from his room—where he could be heard flinging wet boots and clothes about—from whence he emerged later, shivering a little.

Mr Waughope looked at him, and then said, ‘Have some quinine?’ This is the great standby of the European in tropical countries, and

many a time did a visitor suddenly ask for it when some feeling of physical unfitness seized him, and it used to puzzle Moll very much at first.

‘Yes, I think I will,’ agreed Mr Fish, lying down and looking rather tired.

‘You’ve got fever again. I suppose you were talking and didn’t see those clouds. Another time I should keep my weather-eye open; it’s no use giving yourself fever,’ said Mr Waughope, as he fetched the quinine and administered it. ‘Never mind, you’ve got your present. What will you spend it on?’ he added to cheer him up.

‘Present—what present? Oh that bet? That was only a joke; I’m not going to take your five dollars when you don’t bet,’ protested Mr Fish.

‘I may object to betting, but that does not prevent my keeping my promise,’ said Mr Waughope, with a touch of priggishness which always annoyed Mr Fish.

‘Promise be bothered; a joke is a joke, and I don’t take presents of money from any man,’ he replied rather testily, for his head was aching and he did not feel at all well.

Mr Waughope saw that his friend was really not well, so he took no notice of his pettishness, which was very unusual with this light-hearted, easy-going young man. He quietly waited on

him, and persuaded him to go to bed and have some milk, as he was very thirsty.

The next morning he was too ill to go to 'muster'—that is, to the mustering of his coolies at six o'clock; and Mr Meredyth sent Ken down after breakfast to see him, and find out if he needed a doctor.

But by this time the attack—thanks to quinine—was passing off. 'No, thanks; I'm all right. There is plenty to do without fussing over every man who has a touch of fever,' replied Mr Fish, quite his cheery self again.

'You had a pretty bad touch in the night, for I came in to see you, and you were frightfully hot,' remarked Mr Waughope.

'Yes, that's Moll's fault; she is dreadfully penitent about insisting upon going on to that *kampong* in the rain. She asked me to tell you she did not know it would give you fever, and if you ever take her out again she will do what she is told. I give the message for what it is worth, though for my part I place no reliance upon Moll or her good resolutions,' laughed Kenneth.

Mr Waughope looked at Mr Fish; but the latter avoided his eye as he replied, 'She was all right. Tell her I'm game for another walk to-morrow.'

'Then you might just go up to the office and get five dollars out of the safe, and send it to

Singapore for that chair you promised me,' remarked Mr Waughope dryly.

Mr Fish laughed. 'If you hadn't come here and let the cat out of the bag, Ken, I should have got off that five dollars!' he protested.

'What cat and what five dollars? I don't know what you two fellows are talking about!' exclaimed Kenneth.

'The cat was never in any bag—that is to say, I knew quite well you weren't such an idiot as to go for a walk of your own accord with a storm coming up, and I also knew Moll Meredyth rather better than you did, as it appears,' explained Mr Waughope.

Mr Fish did not argue the matter; but as soon as he could walk he went up to the manager's bungalow to show Moll that he was none the worse for his wetting. But his visit had the opposite effect upon Moll, who was secretly rather disturbed at the visible effect his attack of fever had had upon him (as it so quickly has in the tropics).

She was sitting under the veranda, amusing herself with the orang-outangs and the monkeys, her mother having apparently nothing to say to her, and here Mr Fish joined her. 'Bébé is the dearest and most affectionate little creature in the world,' she told him.

'She hasn't that character among the coolies,' observed Mr Fish.

‘Oh they are cowards and don’t come near her, and of course she despises people who are afraid of her,’ said Moll.

‘She doesn’t despise their food, for a few months ago the manager brought her out into the fields, and she found their *makan* in a corner and ate it; and when they went flying to rescue it from her clutches she went for them, biting and scratching in all directions like a tigress, till the coolies fled and left her in possession eating their food and making faces at them—little demon!’ related Mr Fish.

Moll only laughed at this tale. ‘It was their own fault. Why didn’t they catch her and stop her? Such a dear little thing!’ and Moll stroked and patted the monkey, which was quite gentle with her.

‘Why, indeed! I’d take to my heels at this minute if she were loose; she’s a perfect terror, that beast is. Don’t do it, I tell you!’ This last remark was addressed in a different voice to Moll, who was pretending to let Bébé loose from her chain.

But this unfortunately excited the monkey, who strained and strained at her chain until she did break it, and with a bound leapt on to the veranda, from which coign of vantage she sat and chattered and made faces at Moll.

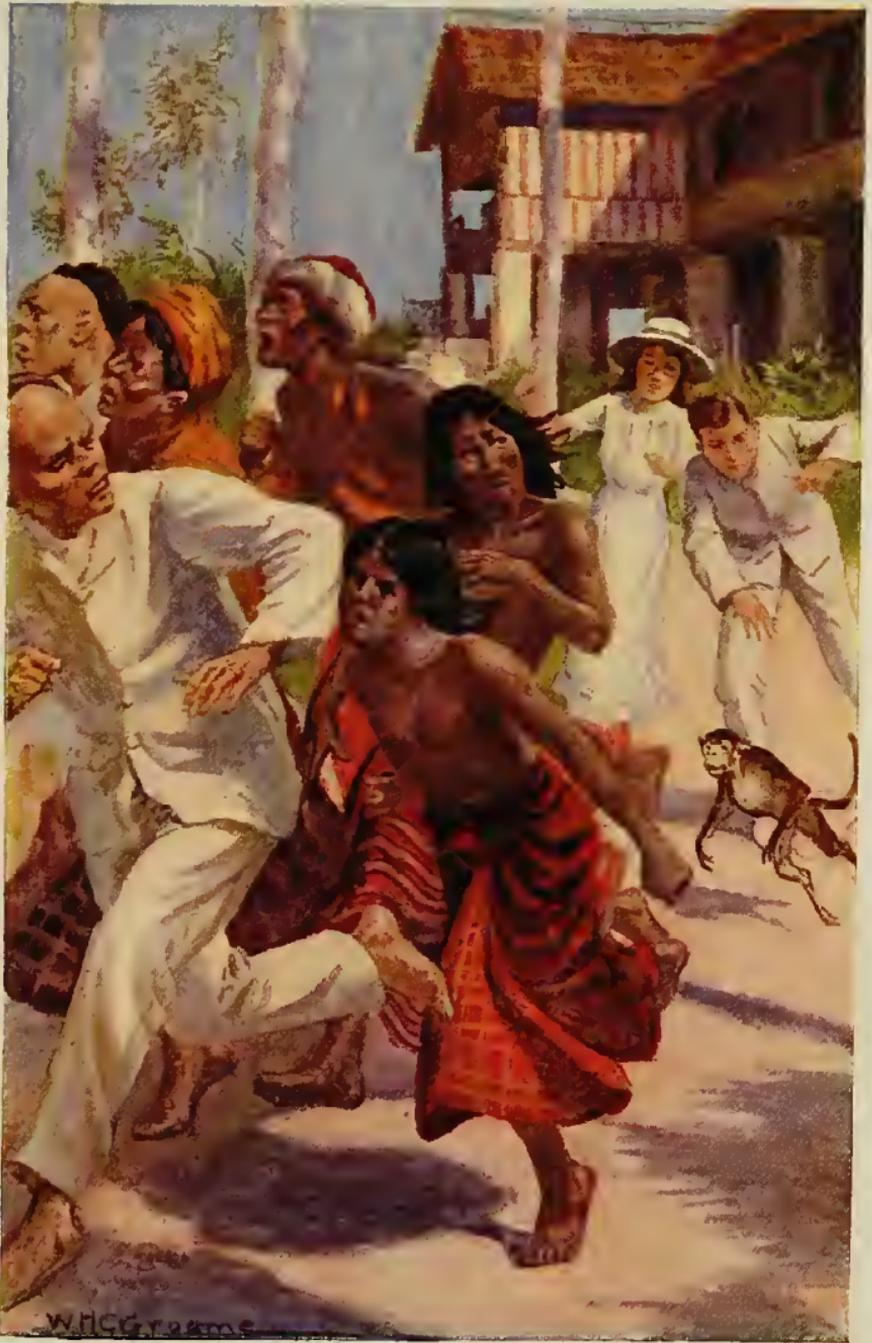
‘Oh catch her! Father will be so angry;

he said she was not safe with the natives,' cried Moll.

Mr Fish valiantly made the attempt; but Bébé, with a scream of anger, leapt upon the top of the kitchen crockery, and proceeded to throw down all the cups, saucers, &c. within her reach.

The Chinese servants and some coolies near came running at the sound of falling crockery; but at the sight of Bébé they cried, '*Munyet!*' (monkey), and fled precipitately. This cowardice apparently roused the little creature's wrath, for she leapt down to the ground, and was after them, catching the last, a little Malay boy, by his *sarong*. The little fellow, with a howl of terror, struggled and fell, and Bébé set her teeth in his leg, whereupon he yelled and was joined by all the others, who, however, kept at a safe distance, while they shouted entreaties in every tongue to Mr Fish and Moll to rescue the boy.

Mr Fish, in spite of his threat to take to his heels, came to the rescue; but Bébé turned upon him, and he had a desperate fight to keep her from biting him, till Moll clasped her in her arms, though only long enough to let the boy get away, for Bébé was too strong for her, and escaped to work further damage, until the servants and coolies decided that matters were becoming too serious, for Bébé had thrown the



They all fled down the drive.

meat and fish for the day's consumption to the dogs, eaten the fruit and vegetables herself, broken a fair proportion of the crockery, and generally created havoc around her. So, encouraged by Mr Fish, they tried to surround and overpower her.

But her taste of freedom, and probably the food she had eaten, had excited her, and she made such violent attacks upon the attacking party that they all fled down the drive, the Chinese servants, in their white suits, leading the way ; and a disorderly procession of Tamil coolies, their long, straight black hair streaming out behind them, and their many-coloured *sarongs* fluttering in the wind, and some Malays, with the monkey in full chase, stopping, luckily for them, to examine any possible food on her way, or she would soon have caught them up, and followed by Moll and Mr Fish, clutching every now and then at her chain, which she immediately pulled out of their reach.

How long this chase would have lasted it is doubtful to say, for at this moment Mr Meredyth, who was superintending the measuring of some rubber-trees in the plantation adjoining them, suddenly looked up and saw this motley crowd advancing towards him.

'Has one of the coolies run amuck?' he asked his *mandor*.

‘I do not know; it looks like it. Defend yourself, *tuau*; he is quite mad,’ replied the man, seizing up the first weapon that came to hand, which happened to be a cup to hold the latex (or rubber milk) that comes out of a rubber-tree.

It was not a very useful weapon, and Mr Meredyth did not avail himself of it, but stood up square to meet the man, whom he saw now was his own cook, and who was gasping, ‘*Munyet! munyet!*’

Mr Meredyth laughed. ‘It’s that vixen Bébé. All right—pass on. I’ll catch her;’ and he made for Bébé, who, however, thought she might as well make the best of her day, and climbed a banana-tree on the other side of the drive, where she sat and ate bananas, and threw the skins at any one who came near the tree.

As the tree was too slender for any one to climb up, there was nothing for it but to wait Bébé’s pleasure, and it was while doing this that Mr Meredyth noticed Mr Fish.

‘You have no right here, man, in the sun; and without a hat! You must be mad. Here, take my *topee* and go home; I’ll use a banana-leaf or two till they bring me another hat. You’ll have fever or sunstroke after this. Here, sit down,’ he wound up gently, for Mr Fish, after trying in vain not to give way, was

fain to lean up against a tree to cover the faintness which was threatening to overcome him.

‘I’m all right, Meredyth,’ he declared; but Mr Meredyth signed to a coolie to get him a cocoa-nut, which he put to Mr Fish’s lips, and was pleased when it revived him.

‘How did she break that chain?’ asked the manager.

‘She is very strong,’ said Mr Fish hastily, for he was afraid Moll would get blamed.

But Moll was too frank a character not to own up when she was in fault. ‘I was playing with her and excited her, father,’ she said.

‘Oh well, you must have some playfellow, or you would forget how to play. She’s tired of bananas now and is coming down, which is a blessing, as I want my tiffin.—Come along, Fish, and let the *mem* doctor you up a bit,’ said Mr Meredyth.

‘Thank you very much; but I think, if you don’t mind, I’ll go back to our bungalow and take the day off. I don’t feel very fit,’ he replied.

‘Perhaps you’re wise, you certainly don’t look fit; take plenty of quinine.—Come along, Bébé. Yes, you are very loving now, but you’ve given a lot of trouble,’ said the manager, as he caught Bébé, who nestled in his arms quite quietly, and let herself be chained up again.

‘Perhaps it is just as well that Mr Fish did not come to lunch, as we have only tinned food for lunch, and not too many plates left to eat it off,’ said Mrs Meredyth in a voice of quiet resignation, for she was used to these upheavals in the domestic circle.

The manager only laughed, and Kenneth, who was the quintessence of law and order, only shrugged his shoulders; he too being used to the ways of his uncle’s menagerie.

Moll felt rather guilty, and stole glances at her mother from time to time, who was so quiet, as a general rule, that it was difficult to tell what she felt or thought; but her daughter guessed that she was not too pleased with her, and her mother’s silence on the subject had more effect than any amount of scolding would have had.

Cookie managed to send up a tiffin that would not have disgraced a Paris *chef*, in spite of the disasters of the morning, and the planter’s family took the destruction of their crockery more lightly in a country where white ants, moths, hurricanes, and heat and mildew frustrate all attempts at having a luxurious home, and teach people to lead the simple life from necessity, not from fancy.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BENGALI PLOT.

THE next day Kenneth came home, looking very worried.

‘Cheer up, Ken ; you must take things easy in this country, or you will never make old bones,’ said Mr Meredyth, as he saw his nephew’s serious face.

‘Our bullocks won’t make old bones by the look of them ; I could only get three pairs to plough to-day.’

‘Ah, how was that?’ inquired the planter, pricking up his ears, for disease among the cattle was not a small matter.

‘They were ill or something ; half of them were too weak to stand,’ replied Kenneth.

‘I must go and see about that ; it won’t be any joke to have all our bullocks slaughtered for foot-and-mouth disease!’ exclaimed the planter, starting up with his usual impetuosity.

‘I don’t think you can do anything. I have told the men to take them out to graze,’ objected Kenneth, who disliked being interfered with, especially as he and his uncle, as a rule, looked at things quite differently, and did not agree in their methods of working.

‘I shall see for myself anyway. I paid a lot for those bullocks while you were in England,

and they were all right till you came back,' said the planter.

Mrs Meredyth looked quickly at Kenneth to see whether he was offended by this remark; but her nephew was too well used to his uncle's ways to mind, and only said, smiling, 'I haven't done anything to them.'

'Then you ought to have,' grumbled his uncle.

'Father, let me come; I like those bullocks!' cried Moll.

'Come along, then,' said her father; and they went together to the bullock-shed, where Mr Meredyth exclaimed at the emaciated condition of the beasts. 'They looked all right last week, and it certainly is not foot-and-mouth disease,' he muttered, examining them carefully one by one.

Moll, who, however fond she was of animals did not care to go into the bullock-shed, stood at the door, patting a thin beast that was tethered to a stump; and, happening to look up, she caught an expression on the face of the tall Bengali who was just behind her father, which struck her as being very evil. She watched him following her father from one beast to another with a look of deep concern when Mr Meredyth turned to speak to him, and a slight sneer, as it seemed to Moll, when he was unobserved; and once he exchanged

glances with his fellow-Bengali, all of which Moll noted, and determined to relate to her father when she should see him alone. Then she suddenly bethought herself that they probably could not understand her, and she asked her father.

‘These Bengalis understand English? No, of course not. Why?’ he asked.

‘Because I believe they have been starving these bullocks, and keeping the money for their food,’ she announced.

Mr Meredyth looked amused. ‘You evidently understand Malay, though you declare you can’t learn it. That is just what I have been accusing them of.’

‘I didn’t understand a word you were saying. It was only their faces; they look quite pleased at the bullocks being ill,’ said Moll indignantly.

‘Eh, what!’ cried Mr Meredyth; and, after giving the men a keen glance, he continued, ‘Upon my word, Moll, I believe you are right. I did hear that these men were discontented, and I should not wonder if this is their way of thwarting me; it would be just like them, the rascals. I’ll pack them off, and give the bullocks to some Tamils to take care of.’

Moll wandered about by herself while her father was scolding and dismissing the Bengalis; and as she strolled about she saw a little hut, into which she peeped out of curiosity. She

came out when she saw that it only contained bullock-food, which smelt very funny.

‘What do they eat, father?’ she asked.

‘Grass and mealies, which is boiled up for them every evening. I think I’ll have them up in that shed near the bungalow where I can see the food cooked,’ replied the planter.

‘Won’t it smell rather horrid? Mother does not like disagreeable smells,’ suggested Moll.

‘Why should it smell horrid? It is all good and wholesome stuff,’ protested Mr Meredyth.

‘Then that can’t be bullock-food in that shed, for it smelt awful,’ said Moll.

‘What shed? Where?’ demanded her father, coming to a sudden stop.

They had gone some distance from the bullock-shed by this time; but Moll pointed to the little hut she meant, into which at that moment the Bengalis disappeared.

‘There’s some rascally work going on here,’ said the planter, and he turned and ran across the plantation. Before the men could make their escape, he was upon them, and Moll heard his voice raised in tones of thunder, while one of the Bengalis knelt at his feet with hands uplifted, evidently praying for mercy. Her father gave some orders in very severe tones to some other men near, and then joined Moll.

‘The estate owes you a debt of gratitude, Moll. Those wretches were actually poisoning my bullocks, and I should never have had proof positive if you had not gone into that hut, for it is a disused well, and I should not have thought of searching it!’ he exclaimed, evidently very pleased at having found out the mystery of his sick cattle.

‘But, father, what a stupid way of revenging themselves; it could do them no good,’ objected Moll as she walked beside her father, trying to lengthen her step to keep pace with him.

‘Revenge generally is stupid, and never did do any one good,’ agreed Mr Meredyth.

‘Yes, but they might have done something a little cleverer than that; they might have known it would be found out and stopped,’ argued his daughter.

‘I never think criminals are so clever. They may be up to a certain point; but if you notice, or will notice when you are older and know the world better, they always do something stupid, so that they are found out sooner or later,’ said Mr Meredyth.

‘I wonder why that is,’ pondered Moll.

Mr Meredyth, like most men, did not care to talk religion, so he only said a little shyly, ‘I do not think it is permitted; the wicked flourish like a bay-tree, but in the end they

perish miserably, as those Bengalis will ; and, at all events, they will starve a little themselves now, for, as it happens, this is the end of the month, and I should pay them their month's wages to-morrow, but not a cent will they get from me.'

Kenneth was rather annoyed that he had not found out the cause of the bullocks' illness himself, and demurred as to the wisdom of cutting all their wages.

'They 'll give trouble, uncle,' he declared.

'They 'll clear off, and as for giving trouble, they can't do any more harm,' contradicted the planter.

'I shall be very much surprised if they don't. I think I had better warn the *sinna durai* to be on the lookout for rows,' Ken remarked.

'There won't be any rows ; I know those fellows well. They may poison your beasts behind your back, but they are abject cowards to your face (the bad ones I mean). You always croak ; take it easy, my boy, take it easy,' declared his uncle.

Kenneth did not argue further, but he took the opportunity that evening of going to play bridge with the other assistants and a friend of theirs, and telling them to look out for squalls at the paying of the coolies next day.

'I expect there will be some grumbling, because a lot of Chinese have had their names

cut * this month, and they always make a row about it; but it soon calms down,' said Mr Fish.

'Yes, but those Bengalis are not to have a cent of wages,' objected Kenneth.

'Serve them right, the villains, for poisoning the bullocks and stopping all our ploughing at this busy season, to say nothing of such cold-blooded cruelty to dumb brutes,' protested Mr Waughope hotly.

'Of course it serves them right, but they can't starve; and, though they won't do anything themselves, they'll incite the Chinese to fight very likely,' said Kenneth.

'All right, I'll go down with a revolver,' declared Mr Fish, joking.

'For heaven's sake don't. You know what happened to Jolly from Kansas? They ran him in for manslaughter for defending his manager, and probably saving his life, when his coolies had him down on the ground,' said Kenneth, alluding to a recent case which had caused great wrath among the planters, who said if an assistant might not get a revolver from the house and use it when his manager was on the ground and unconscious, and surrounded by a gang of furious coolies, when might a man use a revolver in self-defence?

'Ah, I forgot Jolly; that was hard luck on

* Pay stopped.

him. He got off with a fine, but it'll stand against him to have been charged for manslaughter,' said Mr Fish gravely.

'We ought to have petitioned against such treatment from English magistrates who come out here and don't understand the country or anything,' declared Kenneth, and the conversation turned upon this case, which was naturally of great interest to planters and their assistants; and it was only at pay-time when the bad gang of coolies, who had half-pay for bad work, began to be threatening that the young men thought of Ken's warning, and discovered that neither of them chanced to have a stick, and that Mr Meredyth, having driven down, was without one too. Kenneth had a cane, but it did not look a very deadly weapon, and there were only their fists to trust to.

Kenneth was right, as the others felt, for this was no mere murmuring; and though the Bengalis kept in the background, Ken noticed that they were very excited, and evidently inflaming the anger of the others and urging them to take to violence.

Mr Meredyth stood and faced the men, and the young men forced their way to him, and set their faces for a fight, as they saw creeses (Malay knives) being brandished.

'Drop those knives, or I'll knock you down!' thundered the planter.

But the men, secure in their overwhelming numbers, only pressed nearer.

‘Now for it, boys, give them one from the shoulder, and keep clear of those creeses!’ cried the manager.

The four determined Englishmen made a step forward, fists clenched and shoulders squared, and bore down upon the excited, howling mob of Chinese, with the Bengalis on the outskirts of the crowd.

Unfortunately, the gangs which were being paid now were new to the estate, and had come off a very badly managed one, and they had not had time to like the manager here, as most of his own coolies did. A creese flashed in the air and came down—three of the Englishmen did not know where; but the fourth, maddened by the pain in his left shoulder, struck out with his right hand and felled the man, and wrenched his creese from him, which he in his turn held aloft, all dripping with blood.

‘Back with you to your lines!’ shouted Mr Meredyth, and he and the other three made a rush at the men.

There was a moment of doubt—a wavering. They looked at the creese, which bore ominous witness against them, and suddenly they turned and fled, yelling, shouting, and panting, to their lines, and left the four Englishmen looking after them.

‘Fish, you are wounded! What is it?’ cried Mr Meredyth anxiously.

‘That’s all right; just a scratch from this weapon, which, by the way, is a very fine creese; I shall keep it as a curiosity. I don’t fancy the owner will care to claim it,’ observed Mr Fish with a laugh.

‘It’s more than a scratch; come up and let my wife bandage it. Come at once, all of you; the car is here,’ insisted Mr Meredyth.

The assistants, feeling that they wanted some sort of change, got in, and the four drove up to the house, where Mrs Meredyth was awaiting them anxiously, having had news of the disturbance.

‘It’s all right, really,’ declared Mr Fish.

‘I wonder what you call all wrong, then?’ asked Moll, looking at his coat; whereupon Mr Fish noticed for the first time that his white coat, which by ill chance he had put on instead of his khaki, was red.

‘Oh bother; how nasty it looks! I’ll go home and change,’ he declared cheerily, in spite of a white face, due to loss of blood.

But this, of course, he was not allowed to do, and Mrs Meredyth, not for the first time, doctored and nursed her husband’s assistant till the doctor came and declared the wound to be painful, but not serious.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A TRIP TO JOHORE.

‘I SHALL run them in—the whole lot of them!’ declared the justly irate planter, as he sat with the doctor and his family at tiffin after the occurrences related in the last chapter.

‘I should hope so. I only wish I could say the wound was serious, but fortunately it is not,’ replied the doctor.

‘Thank goodness for that,’ Mrs Meredyth said.

‘Yes, I shall charge them with poisoning my bullocks and then trying to murder us,’ continued Mr Meredyth.

‘I think it would have been better if you had done that at first,’ said Mrs Meredyth gently. It was very seldom she gave an opinion upon anything connected with her husband’s work; but she felt that it would be a good opportunity to express her strong feeling upon this subject, which was a vexed one, and she considered that life would be much safer in the jungle if recourse were had to the law in these cases, instead of any dispute between master and coolie being settled by the former, which was Mr Meredyth’s method, as it was that of most planters, chiefly because

they found it a quicker way of settling things than taking them many miles to the nearest law-court and charging them there.

‘Well, perhaps you are right; I wish I had now, for Fish would not have that nasty cut on his shoulder if I had.—I only hope it won’t give you fever, my boy!’ said the manager kindly.

‘Oh dear me, no; I don’t feel anything to speak of, and, pray, don’t bother to go to the courts on my account,’ he begged.

‘I’ll most certainly go, on all our accounts. Do you suppose I’m going to let my coolies knock about my assistants whenever they happen to be annoyed? No, indeed; down we go to Johore the very first opportunity and have them punished, as soon as you are fit to give evidence against them,’ said Mr Meredyth.

‘Oh father, do let me come too; I do want to see Johore again, and all those funny Chinese streets!’ cried Moll.

‘You! What do you think we should do with you in a hot, stuffy court full of Malays? No, no; you are not mixed up in this row, for a wonder, so you will keep out of it, please,’ replied her father.

‘I could give evidence if I liked, for I saw it all from the office window,’ observed Moll, to their universal surprise.

Mrs Meredyth looked very vexed. 'Surely that will not be necessary; there will be enough to bear witness without Moll?' she asked.

'Yes, of course; I should not think of letting the child appear in a Malay court of justice. Besides, she could not have seen much from the office. What surprises me is that she stayed there; it would have been just like her to run out to the rescue,' declared Mr Meredyth. 'Moll must be learning sense at last.'

Moll looked rather crushed, and said, 'I couldn't help myself. Some interfering person locked the door of the office, and I couldn't get out of those windows; they were shut for the night.'

'Locked the door! I don't think that is likely with you in it! Only the *jagas** have the key, and they would never take the liberty. All the same, it's a very good thing you thought it was locked,' observed her father.

'It was, or we should certainly have had you to defend as well as ourselves,' agreed Kenneth.

Mr Waughope cleared his throat. 'I am afraid you will think it a liberty, Mr Meredyth, but I locked the door.' Mr Waughope, as has been said, stammered when he was shy or

* Watchmen.

nervous, and he was some time getting this confession out.

Mrs Meredyth smiled reassuringly at the embarrassed young man, and the others, though they did not dare to smile for fear of Moll's wrath, were much amused; but Mr Meredyth had no such fear, and throwing back his head he laughed heartily.

'Well done, Waughope; you evidently know how to manage turbulent children. It was no liberty on your part, but a wise act.—Don't look so angry, Moll; Mr Waughope only did it for your safety. You ought to thank him, instead of glaring at him like that,' he added.

But Moll was not in the least grateful, and seeing that her father was in a good humour, she urged her request to go to Johore with him. 'It's such a lovely motor-drive, and I never saw it the other night when Charles drove us home. And I needn't go into the law-court at all; I can just motor about Johore with Charles while you are there, or sit at the Johore hotel window, looking out on to the street, with all those people passing and the boats going up and down the Straits.'

'Yes, and when you got tired of watching the people passing and the boats, you would look round for some more mischief to do. No, I think we must leave you at home this time. Another day I'll take you down myself, when

your mother is stronger, and show you the Istana; that's worth seeing, especially the Sultan's jewels.'

'Istana! What's the Istana?' demanded Moll.

'The palace of the Sultan of Johore,' explained Kenneth.

Then Mr Fish came to the rescue. 'There's a football match on to-morrow, which Moll could watch from the hotel windows; it is the final cup match, and it would interest her to see football played by natives,' he suggested with his usual good-natured desire to give pleasure.

'Why, so it is; it's a good thing Fish reminded me, uncle,' said Kenneth. 'I promised to play in this match, and they would have been frightfully annoyed with me if I had forgotten all about it, which, to tell the truth, is just what I had done!' he exclaimed.

'Why are you playing, Ken? You are not native surely?' cried Moll.

They all laughed at Moll's way of expressing herself, as if there were a doubt about Ken's nationality.

'No, I am not a native, but I am going to play with them and for them,' he responded dryly.

'Then I simply must go and see you play, my own cousin,' affirmed Moll.

‘What do you say, *mem*? Shall we take her?’ inquired the planter of his wife.

Mrs Meredyth looked doubtful; but Kenneth—who was pleased that Moll should wish to see him play, though as a matter of fact she would have been just as pleased to see the Malays provided she had her expedition—promised to take care of her, and so her mother gave her consent. The next morning very early the party set out on their long motor-drive.

‘And I wonder what mischief she’ll manage to get into to-day,’ was Mr Waughope’s parting comment to Mr Fish as the party, consisting of the manager, his daughter, Ken, and Mr Fish, started in the motor, with Charles as driver.

Mr Fish laughed light-heartedly; he was as pleased as a boy to have a day’s holiday off the estate, and he considered it cheaply bought at the cost of a knock on the shoulder. ‘We’ll keep an eye on her among the three of us, and I bet she doesn’t go off to Singapore this time,’ he retorted, this taunt being a standing joke against Mr Waughope.

‘Mind she doesn’t take you into a swamp and get you fever again,’ Mr Waughope warned him.

But Moll sat in front with her father all the way to Johore, and on her arrival there she

was sent motoring round with Charles till Mr Meredyth should be free to look after her. 'Now mind, Charles, you are not to let Miss Moll out of your sight,' his master warned him.

'Right, sir,' said Charles, touching his cap.

'Then you'll have to let your car out of your sight, that's all about it, for I'm tired of sitting here, and I'm going to have a walk.'

'You can't do that, miss, not even if I put up the car; it would look bad,' declared Charles.

'What nonsense! Why would it look bad? Look at all those people walking about; they don't look at all bad,' protested Moll.

'Those are natives or Chinese or Klings. A European can't possibly walk out here; it would never do,' persisted Charles, as Moll looked dissatisfied at the prospect of a drive.

'Why wouldn't it do? One would think we wanted to pretend we were cripples and were not able to walk; you are a European, and yet you walk when you are not driving the car,' argued Moll.

'No, miss, that I do not. I've been out here two years now, and I've never walked a hundred yards yet on a road; shouldn't think of doing such a thing,' Charles said earnestly.

'How do you get about then?' asked Moll.

'In a rickshaw, miss, or a *gharry*.'

'You ought to be ashamed of yourself, giving yourself such airs!' retorted Moll.

Charles only smiled. 'No airs, miss; only keeping up the prestige of the white man.'

'If you can't keep yourselves up without that'—began Moll; and then broke off, 'Oh Charles, what a pretty house with all those minarets! Do you think that's marble?'

'That's some kind of temple, I believe,' replied the man.

'Let's go and look at it,' cried Moll.

'I don't think that they allow ladies, Miss Moll, but I'll ask,' said Charles, who saw no objection to this, and he turned the car up the road leading to the Johore mosque, and made inquiries in Malay. 'It's all right, you can come in, as there's no service going on; it's a Mohammedan mosque,' he informed her.

So Moll, accompanied by the chauffeur, went up the garden through the large court, with its large, square tank full of cool, green water, and up the steps till she came to the porch with its marble steps, where the Malay in charge stopped and said something, at which Charles demurred.

Moll was always impatient at not understanding what they said. 'I suppose he wants some money. Give him a dollar, Charles,' she commanded.

'He won't take money, miss; he says it's

free to go in, but we must take off our shoes. I've offered him a dollar to keep them on, but they're very particular about the forms of their religion,' observed Charles.

'I suppose they think they are dirty. Tell him we have come in a car, and have not walked at all,' suggested Moll.

But Charles's arguments were all in vain. 'I'm sorry, miss, but we must give it up; he won't hear reason,' said Charles at last.

'Then we must,' responded Moll, as, squatting down on the steps, she proceeded to take off her shoes.

This shocked Charles's idea of propriety, but as Moll would not 'hear reason' from him, and was just disappearing into the temple, Charles tugged at his boots, and, getting himself very heated, got them off, muttering the while over the stupid ways of these blacks (who are not black at all), and hurried after Moll, to find her much interested in the marble floor and the beautiful candelabra, and finally determined to climb up a small spiral iron staircase, which she guessed led to the tower.

After her toiled Charles, perspiring freely. 'Miss Moll, don't go any farther; you'll get your feet blistered on this scorching roof and a sunstroke into the bargain,' protested Charles, as Moll started to cross the flat roof of the mosque to get to the prayer-turret.

'There's no fear of sunstroke; I've got my *topee* on, and so have you, and I must see the view from that tower; let's run and we sha'n't feel the heat so much,' said Moll, for the corrugated iron was scorching hot under their feet. But, naturally, running in the blazing sun made them hotter still, and Moll was fain to sit down when they reached the tower and hold her feet, the soles of which were burning.

'If you'd been ruled by me, Miss Moll'—began Charles, with satisfaction in his voice.

'I should not have seen this view,' Moll interrupted, climbing the steep stairs.

There was certainly a very fine view of the Straits and the island of Singapore opposite, and the hills of Johore; but Charles declined to agree that it was worth the trouble of getting up there, and declared when they got back to the motor that he didn't hold with such religions.

'Is it worth seeing?' shouted the voice of an American behind them; and Moll, turning round, saw a procession of three rickshaws with three Americans arriving.

'Yes, rather, only you've got to take off your shoes and stockings,' said Moll.

'Oh thanks! Well, you go and see the Istana; that's a sight worth seeing too; the jewels are magnificent,' they shouted, as a return piece of information.

‘We can’t see that without permission from the Sultan,’ said Charles with decision.

‘Bother! let’s go and look at the outside at any rate,’ said Moll.

Charles was looking so grave that Moll suddenly demanded the meaning. ‘Are you sulking because you had to go across that hot roof; I don’t call that keeping up the prestige of the European.’

‘No, miss; I’m thinking about what you said to those American ladies; it wasn’t kind,’ he remarked. Charles spoke his mind very freely to Moll, as may be seen.

‘Kind! to tell them the mosque was worth seeing? It was very kind of me.’

‘That’s all right; but you told them they had to take off their stockings, and a nice state their feet will be in, poor things,’ said Charles feelingly.

Moll gave a peal of laughter. ‘It was a mistake, really, Charles, and they’ll never go across that roof in bare feet, you may be sure.’

‘Being Americans, you may be sure that they will; I’ve driven them, so I know. They stick at nothing, and they’d rather have the soles of their feet flayed than miss a sight when they are touring. There’s the palace—Istana, they call it, miss.’

CHAPTER XXV.

A DAY'S PLEASURING.

CHARLES brought the motor to a standstill at the bottom of the drive leading to the Istana, the palace of the Sultan of Johore.

Moll looked at the palace grounds, which are very pretty, and then at the palace itself, which is a mean and somewhat dilapidated building of stucco, which is discoloured and even broken away in parts.

‘The outside isn’t worth looking at; it’s the inside that matters. Look, there’s an Englishman going in; do let’s follow him!’ cried Moll, pointing out a fair-haired young man, who had just whizzed round the corner and up the drive to the Sultan’s palace in a reckless style, much disapproved of by Charles, who looked after him doubtfully. He did not like to refuse Moll; in fact, her enthusiasm was catching, and he enjoyed taking her about, so he turned up the drive and met the young Englishman just coming out of the palace.

‘Won’t they let you in?’ demanded Moll.

The young man looked up, a little surprised at the address by an utter stranger; but seeing that it was only a schoolgirl he forgot to be shy, as he usually was, and answered, ‘Oh I only went to shoot a card.’

'Shoot a card? Oh I see what you mean—to call. I thought at first that it was some kind of game,' laughed Moll.

The young man had young sisters at home, of whom Moll reminded him, and he laughed back. 'Do you want to see the Istana?' he asked.

'Yes, but we haven't a permit. How do you get one?' she demanded.

'From the Sultan; but he doesn't live here. He lives at Singapore, although I dare say I could get you in; they know me well here,' he replied, turning and speaking to a young Malay at the door.

'It's the Sultan's orders, *tuan*,' protested the man.

'Yes, we know all about that; but this is a young friend of mine, and you know me. I dined here only the other day off the gold plate, and H.H.* only made that rule because some strangers stole something. Let's go through.'

The man demurred, but at last gave way, and, to Moll's delight, they entered the palace, and were just admiring a stuffed tiger when they heard an argument, and found that Charles was hotly demanding to be let in to look after his young mistress.

'I'll take care of this young lady,' the young man assured him.

* His Highness, as the Sultan is familiarly called in Johore.

'I dare say, sir, but the master's orders were not to let her out of my sight, and out of it she sha'n't go,' said the man sturdily.

Moll laughed, and said impatiently, 'He'll have to come; Charles is as obstinate as a mule.'

'Well, come on, Charles.—It's all right, Hajzi; her servant has to come too. I'll answer for him.'

Somehow the young man was so quiet and shy that they trusted him; and the two, followed by Charles, who walked respectfully behind Moll, mounted the stairs to the long ballroom and banqueting-hall.

'I feel like the walrus in *Alice in Wonderland* with a porpoise close behind me,' said Moll confidentially to the young man, whose name she did not even know.

'He has a purpose, and that is to look after you, and quite right too, for, after all, I am only a stranger to you, though I know who you are,' he replied.

'Oh but you have such an honest face Charles need not have worried! But how do you know who I am?' asked Moll.

The young man coloured at Moll's candid remark, and replied, 'I have heard of you. Besides, your father has come down to-day about a case of assault by some rascally coolies; I hope they'll get it hot.'

'I wish people wouldn't "hear about me;" every one I meet says that, with a horrid smile,' retorted Moll.

'I haven't heard anything bad, only that you are a sport. Here is the gold plate we dine off on the Sultan's birthday.'

'Does the food taste better off gold?' asked Moll, while Charles gazed with awe and delight at the massive gold dinner-service.

'I don't know that it does, though the food is very good,' laughed their escort.

Moll's admiration of the jewels was loud and sincere, and Charles's joy when the polite Malay attendants handed him the jewel-topped swords and priceless orders to hold was amusing to see.

'I'm holding thousands of pounds' worth in my hands,' he said with pride.

Their young escort laughed. 'Yes, you'd be a rich man for life if you pocketed one of those jewels,' he said.

Charles's face was a study. 'Sir, I'd sooner sweep a crossing all my life!' he exclaimed, much affronted.

'Charles is horribly serious; he depresses me. I'm very glad I met you going through the palace; it has been much better fun with you than it would have been alone.'

The young man coloured again with pleasure. 'Perhaps we shall meet again; and here's my card, in case you forget me,' he said shyly.

'Edmund Courteney; all right, I'll remember. Thank you very much for taking me over the palace. Good-bye,' said Moll as they drove off in the motor straight to the hotel, for it was near the time appointed for lunch.

But at the hotel they found a note from Mr Meredyth, saying they were detained at court, and Moll must have lunch by herself, and Charles was to look after her.

'There's Mr Courteney having his lunch all alone; I'll go and have it with him,' exclaimed Moll.

'You hadn't better do that, Miss Moll. The gentleman has been kind enough, and he's quite the gentleman, but we don't know him; besides, he'll have a lot of bachelor friends there directly, and he won't want you,' protested Charles.

'I'll ask him,' announced Moll; and to Charles's horror she did.

Mr Courteney laughed. 'Indeed I am not expecting any one, and we'll sit at that little table over there, and Charles shall stand behind your chair to add to your dignity,' he replied.

'It's all right, isn't it, as you've shot a card on me, as you call it?' said Moll, seating herself and preparing to enjoy her Malay curry, which always amused her, being a queer mixture of

fruit, fish, vegetables, and condiments handed round in little dishes, to be added to the curry and rice at will.

Charles took up his station behind Moll's chair, and certainly did add dignity to the proceedings; and Moll, looking at a mirror opposite to her, had much ado to abstain from laughing as she saw the air with which he waved his orders for Moll to the Chinese waiters.

Before lunch was over the two were the best of friends, and Moll had heard all about Mr Courteney's two little sisters at home and all about his butterfly collection, and she was relating to him some of her school escapades when the party from the law-courts came in and stood for a moment in the porch, upon which the dining-room opened, looking in surprise at the scene.

Mr Fish gave a little click of his tongue, and Mr Meredyth muttered, 'Who has she got hold of now?'

But Kenneth, catching sight of Moll's companion, exclaimed, 'Hallo, Courteney, I see you've made friends with my young cousin! Are you playing this afternoon?'

'Yes. I say, introduce me, will you?' replied Mr Courteney.

'Who to? Moll? Rather late in the day, isn't it? I thought you knew her,' began

Kenneth, rather annoyed to find that this was another of Moll's lawless proceedings.

'He does know me; he's called quite properly with a card. Here it is—Mr Edmund Courteney.—Father, let me introduce you to Mr Courteney. He has taken me over the palace, and I've had a lovely morning!' cried Moll eagerly.

The case had gone well, and Mr Meredyth had met some old friends, and he was in a very good temper, so he only laughed. 'This young madcap sets etiquette at defiance; so let us all finish lunch together. You know my nephew, it appears. Are you friends or foes to-day?'

'Friends, I believe—that is, if you are playing for Passy Plangy,' he replied.

'Then I shall have two friends to clap,' announced Moll.

Mr Courteney looked shyly at Mr Meredyth, and said, 'I hope I haven't done wrong, sir? But she reminded me of my own little sisters, and it's such a treat to see a youngster out here.'

'Quite right, my boy; we all feel that, and I am very much obliged to you; she would have been dull this morning. You must run over to our estate, if you get time off, remember—Bukit Ayer,' said Mr Meredyth.

'Fancy if you had left me at home to-day, and made me miss a palace and a mosque and

a Malay football match, wouldn't you have been sorry, father?' said Moll.

'H'm, I should have borne up; the palace and the mosque would have been there another day, and I don't know that this match will be much to see; these Malays are too new at football to be much good, I should think; they'll only kick about the ball a little.'

Fortunately the two were alone, or Kenneth might have been offended. As it was, Mr Meredyth was wondering what to do with his daughter till the football match began, which was not till five o'clock, and it was now only two.

'Wouldn't you like a "lie off," Moll?' he asked, after yawning two or three times.

'No, but you would, so don't bother about me; I promise not to go out alone. Charles is worse than a jailer; won't go more than a yard away from me,' said Moll.

Mr Meredyth laughed as he yawned again. 'Charles is a true Britisher, and as I know you'll keep your word, I'll just have a snooze, while you go up to the club-room and look at the ladies' papers—there will be no one there—and wait till I waken, or Charles comes back from his tiffin,' said her father, his eyes closing as he spoke.

Moll went up to the club-room; but as her mother had two or three illustrated papers out

weekly she soon got tired of looking at them, and began to be bored even by looking out of the window, till she saw Mr Courteney sitting smoking in the gardens opposite.

‘Why aren’t you having a “lie off”?’ she demanded from her window.

Mr Courteney looked up and smiled. ‘Because I am an exception to that rule. Come and sit here; it’s much cooler under these trees than in that club-room.’

Moll needed no second bidding, and joined her young planter-friend of the morning. After a short time they got up and strolled away; while Charles, alas! had a five minutes’ snooze in the car after tiffin, unaware that Mr Meredyth had left him in charge of Moll as well as his car.

When the manager awoke with a start he found it was four o’clock, and, incredible though it was, he had slept two hours. ‘Bless me, that’s because of that long drive and all this worry.—Here, Charles, just go up to the club reading-room and tell Miss Moll I am awake,’ he called out to the chauffeur.

Charles got out of his car, and did as he was bid, only to return with a long face and no Moll.

‘Not there! She promised me not to go out alone; she must have strolled into some other room.—Here, “boy,” go find little *mem*

in the hotel,' he told the Chinese 'boy;' and added, when the 'boy' came back alone, 'Oh well, I sha'n't worry; the girl always keeps her word, so she's all right. Mr Kenneth must have come back and fetched her.'

'*Mem* went out alone that way,' said another 'boy,' pointing directly on to the Straits across the road and gardens.

Mr Meredyth had made up his mind not to worry, but this was too serious news. 'She can't have gone for a sail, eh, Charles?' he said, turning for sympathy to the nearest person.

Charles thought she very likely had if she took it into her head; but only said, 'It's a nice calm day if she has, sir.'

— 'Tut! calm day; she'll be drowned! Why on earth did I go to sleep? Why on earth did you let her out of your sight, man?'

Mr Meredyth was working himself up into one of his 'states,' as Charles saw, so he only made his car safe and went off to make inquiries. 'No one here knows anything, sir; but I expect she's with Mr Kenneth—— No, she's not.' For at that moment Kenneth appeared with Mr Fish, having been to see a friend who was planting (rubber, of course) near Johore.

'M'Pherson has more diseases this time. I never saw such a chap in my life; you never

see him that he does not greet you with the information that he is very ill indeed—fever or sunstroke, or some other deadly complaint!’ cried Kenneth.

‘He’ll be a hypochondriac in a year or so if he doesn’t mind,’ chimed in Mr Fish.

‘M’Pherson’s a fool; but where’s Moll?’

‘Eight eyes aren’t enough for her,’ murmured Mr Fish.

Kenneth looked vexed, and said, ‘Moll disappeared as usual? Well, well, uncle, I’m very sorry to be unsympathetic, but I must go and get ready for this “footer” match; the Malays would be awfully offended if I did not play.’

‘Oh go by all means; Moll will turn up all right—she always does,’ said Mr Meredyth; but he did not look by any means as confident as his words.

‘If you think I could be of any use’—— began Mr Fish.

‘No, no, the girl will get a name for being a regular madcap if we make a fuss; she can’t be far off. She doesn’t come out with me again without her mother; no man can cope with Moll.’

‘She’ll be back for this “footer” match,’ said Mr Fish, to console the worried father.

‘Yes, to be sure,’ he agreed, brightening up.

But five o’clock came, and the match began;

six o'clock, and the sun set, and the match ended. And Mr Meredyth in a panic decided that he must make inquiries.

'She went out with young Courteney directly after tiffin,' said an Englishman who lived at the Johore hotel.

'Courteney! impossible; he's been playing in the match with me,' said Kenneth.

Mr Courteney looked very vexed when asked where Moll was. 'She came into the gardens and talked to me for about half-an-hour. I took her to the water's edge to look at some monkeys playing about there, and said good-bye to her, as I had some business to do.'

Charles came back presently. 'Excuse me, sir, but Miss Moll has gone off in a rickshaw with some big Malay woman, as far as I can understand.'

'Dear, dear, what can she mean by it?' said Mr Meredyth; adding, 'It's all right, of course.'

Mr Fish chuckled. 'Last time it was an old Chinaman and a car; this time it's a woman and a rickshaw. Moll is nothing if not original in her surprises. I expect it's another false alarm, and that it is that Mrs Wilkins who has asked her to her bungalow.'

All the same, it was very worrying. It was now dark, and they had only waited for the football match to please Moll, for Kenneth

could have motored home on a bicycle, and Mr Meredyth would allow no more inquiries to be made; quite unaware that his discretion was wasted, as every European there knew of Moll's disappearance, and was talking of it.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MOLL ENTERTAINED BY THE INCHI BESAR.

‘I SAY, Ken, what’s the next move to be?’ demanded Mr Fish, his usual jauntiness a little subdued, for he had more patience with, and to all appearances more liking for, Moll than either her cousin or Mr Waughope.

‘Goodness knows! I’m sure I don’t. We ought to be half-way home by now; but, of course, we can’t stir till it suits Moll to turn up,’ replied Ken irritably.

‘Of course we can’t; and if it weren’t for the anxiety about her I’d be content to stop here till midnight. There’s a jolly billiard-room in there, and I want a game of snooker, only that it seems heartless,’ observed Mr Fish.

But Kenneth laughed. ‘It’s no good wasting heart upon Moll’s imaginary troubles; she will turn up smiling in a little time, having seen some interesting thing. I dare say she has taken a boat and gone for a row.’

‘In that case I’ll have my game of snooker; just give me a call when you are ready to start,’ said Mr Fish, going off to the billiard-room, whence issued peals of laughter over the innocent game of snooker.

Ken himself felt that, heart or no heart, it behoved him to stop with his uncle, who, true

to his determination not to draw attention to Moll's escapades, was sitting and chatting with acquaintances as if he had not a care in the world, little knowing that these same acquaintances were well aware of his daughter's disappearance, and only kept silence out of sympathy for him and his father's pride. Every now and then he pulled out his watch and looked at it impatiently.

'Are you staying the night, Meredyth?' inquired Mr Wilkins at last.

'I! No—at least I don't think so,' said the planter. 'It's not late.'

'Oh dear no—quite early. Come and dine with us; my wife will be delighted to see you, and your nephew too. I only wish you had brought that jolly little girl of yours with you; we should have liked to see her again,' said Mr Wilkins, with true Eastern hospitality.

Mr Meredyth looked a little embarrassed. 'To tell the truth she did come with us, but she has—er—gone out for a stroll with a—er—friend,' he said.

The Englishmen round exchanged glances; but Mr Wilkins, who had only just come up, guessed nothing, and only said, 'Oh gone out with a friend to look at the Chinese shops, no doubt; they are very pretty when they are lit up, especially to new-comers from home. Then we'll wait for her; she won't be long

now, and we will all go up to our bungalow for *makan*. I'll 'phone to the wife to say so. No, don't say no—there's no hurry; we seldom dine before nine o'clock,' and hospitable Mr Wilkins hurried off to telephone to his wife that he was bringing four extra guests to dinner.

But seven o'clock came, and then eight, and finally nine, and no Moll, for a very good reason, as will be seen.

Moll had said good-bye to Mr Courteney, and promised to watch him playing football; then was dutifully returning to the hotel when she lost her way, and found herself in a back street, where she stood and wondered how she should get back to the hotel.

There were no white people in sight; but presently she saw a pleasant-looking old lady in a rickshaw smiling at her, who, telling the rickshaw coolie to stop, called out to her in excellent English, 'Have you lost your way, little girl?'

For a moment Moll was so surprised to hear such good English from a Malay woman—at least from a person who was dressed as a Malay, in a *sarong* and *baju*, with Malay brooches and ornaments—that she did not answer.

'You need not be afraid of me; I am the Inchi Besar, the Sultan's mother.'

That accounted for her speaking to Moll as an

equal; and, child as she was, Moll felt that it was to a lady, and one used to hold a high position, to whom she spoke, and she answered, 'I am not afraid of you; and, please, will you tell me how I am to get back to the hotel.'

'That is quite near; but what are you doing by yourself? You ought not to walk about Johore alone, you know,' said the Inchi Besar (which means chief princess).

Moll told her about her father and her day's doings, and her listener was very much interested.

'So you liked my son's palace, and the gold plate, and the jewels? They were my husband's, you know, and I used to live in that palace. Did you see the pictures of the great queen—Queen Victoria? My husband visited her. Yes, he stayed at Windsor Castle, and took her down to dinner. They all liked him very much,' said the old lady.

If Moll interested the old lady, she on her side interested Moll, who could have listened for hours to her tales of the late Sultan and his tiger-hunts and his travels, and stories of English royalties and other great folk he had met.

But Inchi Besar could talk of other things as well, and quoted Ruskin and many an author whom Moll knew only by name, a fact of which she was ashamed for the first time.

‘Now, if you like, as you have no one to take care of you for the present, I will take you to a window in my house which overlooks the football ground, and you can see it all from there, which will be more seemly than stopping in the hotel alone, a young girl like you,’ observed Inchi Besar kindly, after they had talked for some time.

Moll was only too pleased, and, as usual, in the moment’s pleasure forgot every one and everything.

‘They play well the Malays. No, I am not a Malay. I am half Chinese, but my husband was a Malay, and my son is a Malay, only he is too big for a real Malay; that is from the Danish blood in me.’ So the old lady talked on, and Moll divided her attention between her and the football field, where a large crowd of Malays, with some Chinese and Klings and a dozen or so Europeans, were gathered to see the last football match of the season.

It was a very different game from what her father had prophesied, for two men were knocked insensible, which stopped the play; and finally, quite near their end of the field, a man trying to kick the ball gave a kick, and they heard distinctly the crack of a bone as the victim fell to the ground, and he was carried off unconscious.

When Inchi Besar turned round to make some remark upon this to her young companion, she found that she had her face covered with her two hands.

‘What! an English girl, and afraid to see sport! He has only broken his leg!’ cried Inchi Besar, and laughed gaily.

Moll took her hands away, and looked rather ashamed of herself. ‘I thought he was killed,’ she said.

‘You would have done him no good by covering your face; you would not do for a nurse in war-time like your great Miss Nightingale. But the match is just over, and we have won; we have never lost a match on our own ground yet,’ said the old lady proudly.

‘It was a very good game,’ said Moll.

‘And now I must go home, and you had better return to your family, I suppose. I am so glad I met you! You must come and see me some day; I live in a house near Johore. Here is my card, and your people will know that you have been well taken care of by Inchi Besar. There is only one Inchi Besar,’ said the old lady, shaking hands with Moll.

Moll did not understand what orders the Inchi Besar was giving to the servant, but she followed him as desired, and all the mistakes which followed arose from the natural politeness of the Malay, which makes him do

whatever you wish. At the door Moll saw a rickshaw, and though the hotel was quite near, she got in as desired, and the coolie started off at his usual run, an unnatural kind of swinging jump, with the heels of his feet scarcely touching the ground.

The Malay gave an order, as he followed in another rickshaw; but the average rickshaw coolie only understands his own particular Chinese dialect, and goes wherever the finger of his passenger points, which is quite satisfactory if the passenger knows what direction he wants to go. As Moll did not know that she ought to have turned to the right to get to the front-door of the hotel, this was fatal, especially as the Malay politely kept behind, and only signed to his runner to follow Moll's rickshaw.

Moll's rickshaw coolie, according to custom, kept straight on until told by a shout and warning finger to turn to right or left, and this warning Moll naturally never gave; so on he went till he could go no farther, Moll meanwhile enjoying, as Mr Wilkins had suggested, the streets and houses lit up with their brilliant Chinese lanterns.

To the right stood a large corner house, very brilliantly lighted, which Moll took to be the hotel, and pointing to it, she said, 'Piggie.'

At last the Malay grasped, as he thought,

what the English young lady wished to do, and when the coolie had driven them up to the front of this building, he got out of his rickshaw, and politely salaaming, mustered up his few words of English, and asked, '*Mem*, want to go in this house?'

'Yes,' said Moll, and he, with a smile, led the way up some stairs through a crowd of noisy Chinese. Moll did not recognise the stairs nor this part of the hotel, and said so to her guide; but his stock of English was exhausted, so, true to his character for politeness, he smiled and did what he imagined she wanted, and showed her into a room with a table in the middle and a lot of better-class Chinese sitting playing some game with little square brass boxes and brass counters.

'Are they gambling?' asked Moll.

The Malay understood the word gambling. 'Yes, they gambling.'

'And is this the hotel, and will my father come here for me?' asked Moll.

'Yes, *mem*,' said the man, not understanding a word, but thinking it courteous to pretend he did.

Moll's conscience was at rest, though if she had used her common-sense she might have known it was no place for her. But the game interested her as much as the football, and she stood and watched, unaware of the curious

glances cast at her, till the face of a young Englishman appeared at the door and as swiftly disappeared, unseen by Moll.

It was nine o'clock, as has been said, and no Moll had appeared, when a young man appeared at the porch of the hotel. He hesitated for a minute at sight of Mr Meredyth sitting peacefully chatting, and then went up to Kenneth, who was a little apart from the others.

'I say, Meredyth, do you know that your young cousin is in a gambling farm?' he asked in low tones.

'The mischief!' ejaculated Kenneth, and, with a hasty glance at his uncle, he replied, 'Take me to her, please, Westcroft;' for these planters all knew each other.

'All right,' he said, and took him to Moll.

Moll looked up, delighted to see Kenneth. 'Here you are at last; I thought you were never coming! I am frightfully hungry!' she cried.

'Don't pretend; it's bad enough coming to this disreputable place without making a joke of it!' said Kenneth, pushing the Chinese aside to make way for Moll.

But Moll was not going to be taken to task by Kenneth. 'Don't make a fuss about nothing. This Malay brought me here to wait for you.'

Kenneth turned on the Malay indignantly; but he, seeing that Moll was at her destination, had thought it wiser to disappear, and so could give no explanation of her presence there.

‘You ought to have stayed in the hotel,’ said Kenneth severely.

‘I *am* in the hotel,’ protested Moll.

‘You must be mad!’ ejaculated Kenneth, as he handed her into a rickshaw and got in himself.

Moll spoke not one word to him; but at sight of her father she cried, ‘Oh father, why have you been so long? I’ve been waiting for you for hours in another part of the hotel.’

‘In the hotel? Then how did you arrive in the rickshaw?’ cried Mr Meredyth.

‘Oh I was in the part with “Gambling Farm” written outside,’ explained Moll innocently.

Several men buried their faces in their tumblers, while Mr Meredyth stared helplessly at Moll.

‘The poor child got mixed up. Never mind, Meredyth; she can’t have lost a fortune, for Europeans are not allowed to gamble. So come along to my place and have dinner; it’s only a little after nine o’clock.’

‘And how are we to get home to-night?’ demanded Mr Meredyth, avoiding comment on Moll’s visit to a gambling farm.

‘You can telephone home to Mrs Meredyth that you are staying with us. You have to come down again to-morrow for your case at any rate, so it will save you the double journey,’ said Mr Wilkins.

‘That’s true,’ agreed Mr Meredyth; and as it was more convenient, he did telephone, and they all dined and slept at Mr Wilkins’s bungalow, where four extra guests for the night did not seem to inconvenience them in the least.

‘Good-night, Moll; I suppose you did it all in innocence, and I have nothing against your visit to her Highness the Inchi Besar, who is a charming old lady; but a gambling farm’—here Mr Meredyth shook his head—‘that’s a little too strong; you ought to have known it was no place for a young lady.’

CHAPTER XXVII.

MOLL HAS A BAD TIME.

‘**M**OTHER, do say something about it,’ urged Moll, the day after her ‘latest madcap trick,’ as her father called it, when they returned home next day.

‘You want me to speak about your mistake of yesterday; but I do not know that I have anything to say that you will like to hear,’ replied her mother, in the quiet tones which always influenced Moll, however wild her mood.

‘I didn’t say that I should like what you said, but I want you to say it all the same,’ explained Moll.

‘Why?’ inquired her mother.

‘Because it has been sticking up like a wall between us ever since those horrid races,’ said Moll.

Mrs Meredyth smiled at Moll’s quaint way of putting it; but she answered gravely enough, ‘I suppose you mean that I have not been quite so friendly with you since you went to the Singapore races without leave. That is true; I have not felt that I could trust you since then. Yes, I know what you are going to say that yesterday was quite a mistake, and I believe you; but if you were in the habit of thinking of other people and their wishes before

your own pleasure you would not have made the mistake. As for the Singapore races, I know you told the hotel porter to ask leave, but that was not the proper way to do it, and it was not quite honest or straightforward.'

'Mother!' cried Moll indignantly; 'mother, whatever else I am, I am not dishonest. I only like a little fun.'

If there was one thing Moll Meredyth prided herself upon it was just that—that although she liked fun, and was full of madcap pranks, they were all above-board and quite innocent, even if they did cause other people inconvenience; so this accusation of her mother's hurt her pride very much.

'I said you would not like what I had to say, Moll,' Mrs Meredyth reminded her in the quiet voice that always influenced Moll.

Moll struggled for a minute between her better and worse self, which wanted to go away and end this unpleasant conversation. 'How was it dishonest?'

'Were you honest with yourself when you sent that message? Did you really think that man would send it as you said it? Or were you certain when you got to Singapore Station that it had arrived, and that we had not answered because we wished you to go, and did not even take the trouble to telephone to you to say so?'

Moll did not make any reply, but sat leaning back on a rattan chair, her hands clasped behind her head, a favourite attitude of hers, and her chin tilted up in a would-be indifferent attitude.

So Mrs Meredyth continued, 'If so, Moll, you are not the intelligent girl I thought you were; moreover, I do not think you asked at Singapore if we had sent an answer, so that it was rather useless to have sent that telephone message at all.'

Moll's chin sank on to her chest; then she said in rather a subdued tone, 'I had got so excited by then that I did not think about it or anything but the races.'

'Supposing it had been anything very important or interesting, a letter you were longing to receive, for instance, do you think you would have forgotten it?' inquired her mother.

'No,' said Moll, and did not say another word of excuse for herself.

'I would rather that you had openly defied me than that you had tried to blind yourself by pretending to ask our permission, which you knew we should not have given. You are a clever girl, Moll; take care not to use your cleverness in getting your own way by doubtful means. I dare say you think I am hard upon you, but I have seen so much of that out here. Perhaps it is not worse than other places. It seems to me that so many clever young men

have come out here, no doubt with the intention of making money honestly; but the opportunity has arisen to make their fortune by some not quite straight deal, and they give way to the temptation. Sometimes it succeeds, and they make their "pile," as they call it, in a few months, and it is hard for those who work steadily on for years to see their less scrupulous contemporaries able to return with a large fortune, while they are obliged to labour on in this hot climate.'

'But, mother, I know it was wrong of me to go to the races, and I will never do such a thing again, I promise you; but I would not do a dishonest thing!' protested Moll.

'But it was just such a story as yours that landed in prison a man I knew,' remarked Mrs Meredyth.

Moll looked up startled. 'Oh mother!' she cried.

Mrs Meredyth was not generally so severe; but Mr Meredyth, who was almost as thoughtless as his daughter, had made so light of her escapade that Moll was inclined to think herself a heroine instead of a naughty girl, that her mother was the more determined to make Moll look at it seriously. 'Yes,' she continued, 'the story you tell of that telephone message is very like his. I will tell you the tale. It was at the time of the rubber boom, when people lost

their heads in the lust for gold, and this young man had some shares to sell, and he received a telephone message to say that they were going up and that he had better hold on. So he disconnected the telephone, as was his habit when he went out, and forgot that he was to receive a message at a certain hour to say the number of shares taken from him by an acquaintance, and as he got no message, he considered the transaction cancelled, and he sold the shares the next day at double the amount to some one else.'

'How mean!' cried Moll, quite forgetting that the moral of the tale was pointed at herself.

'Yes, it was not straightforward; and though of course your case is not parallel, it reminded me of that young man, who said that he had forgotten the telephone, and that he was in such a state of excitement over this buying and selling that he did not think of anything,' observed her mother.

These were almost Moll's own words, and she was much impressed by it; but this was not the end of her troubles when they heard Mr Meredyth's voice raised in angry tones.

'Forgot? Then you had no right to forget such a thing; a very convenient memory that is which remembers only what is pleasant. Perhaps another time that you spend a couple

of hundred dollars for me without my permission or knowledge you will be kind enough to tell me,' he stormed.

'I never meant you to pay,' replied Mr Waughope.

'Pray, do you imagine I am going to let you give my daughter presents of that kind? No, of course I shall stand by your bargain, and a bad one it is too, and get rid of the brute at anything it will bring, if it is only ten dollars. I'll give it away if I can't find a purchaser directly!' cried the irate manager.

'Then, sir, I shall be very glad to buy it of you at a moderate figure,' began Mr Waughope eagerly.

Mr Waughope had not been out long in the Straits, as was evidenced by his respectful mode of addressing his manager, for it was the Malayan custom to call every one by their surname, and very odd Moll used to think it to hear those boys talk to her father as Meredyth. But in spite of its civility, this speech did not please Mr Meredyth, as the young assistant would have known if he had been better acquainted with his manager, who was the most generous of men, and to whom two hundred dollars (twenty-four pounds) was not a matter of great importance, but who resented the transaction not having been mentioned to him.

'Oh dear! oh dear!' cried Moll, half-laughing and half-ashamed of herself.

'What is this, Moll? I hope you have not got into another scrape,' asked Mrs Meredyth.

'It's the same one. I quite forgot, I did really, that I bought a racehorse by mistake,' she exclaimed.

Mr Meredyth came on to the veranda, which, it will be remembered, was the drawing-room or sitting-room of the bungalow, at this moment; and overhearing the last few words, answered them, as well as Mr Waughope's. 'Thank you; I do not care for my assistants to have horses. They are not useful on estate work, and there is not time to exercise them out of hours; nor is it much good having a horse out here—they do not answer for riding; so that I am afraid your mistake will not benefit you much.'

The planter had just received a bill for the keep and treatment of a horse which had been ill, and a request to know when it was to be removed, or what was to be done with it; and he happened to mention the letter to Mr Waughope, whom he met near the house, observing that it must be addressed to him by mistake, only to be told, to his astonishment and wrath, that it was no mistake, and that he was the possessor of a sick racehorse.

'Oh father, I'm very sorry! I really did

mean to tell you I bought that horse!' cried Moll.

'You? Nonsense! they would not sell a horse to a child like you. I suppose this obliging young man bid for you; and if so, he ought to have known better,' said her father.

'No, he didn't. I asked Mr Clark to bid, and I do wish you'd keep it; you always said I should have a horse when I was grown-up,' said Moll.

'You are very far from being grown-up, and still farther from having a horse. I only meant that if we had been in England.—But I am sorry I spoke so to you, Waughope. It appears it is another of my daughter's lawless pranks, which she doesn't even think fit to tell me about.—Don't say again that you forgot; that is no excuse—I have heard too many of these excuses. First you forget to ask leave, and forget that I object to my assistants going to the races. You forget that I have forbidden you to leave the hotel without leave, and go to a gambling saloon and Singapore by yourself; and then you crown all by throwing away two hundred dollars on a good-for-nothing race-horse, which any one with a grain of sense would know is fit for nothing but to run in a race. You are not to be trusted; go to your room, and do not come out again to-day!' cried Mr Meredyth.

Moll crimsoned with shame at being punished like this and before Mr Waughope. Moreover, it was a real punishment, for it was a hot, sultry day, and the only breeze to be got was on the veranda, and Moll found her room very hot and stuffy with only two windows.

Mrs Meredyth never questioned her husband's commands, but she regretted this one very much. Mr Meredyth, as will have been seen, was not always judicious or just in his treatment of those around him, as his coolies sometimes found; but his wife knew that when his anger cooled he would probably relent and have Moll out. She determined, if she got an opportunity, to beg him not to go to the other extreme and pet her, and to ask him to leave her to speak to Moll.

Mr Waughope went away when he found he could do no good to Moll by staying; but he felt as if he could not go home, so sat in the tennis-ground, and waited within sight of the manager's bungalow, in case he got a chance of speaking to Mr Meredyth and putting in a word for Moll. It was after tiffin, and he had no afternoon supervision, as it happened, so he was free; and as he and Moll had not been on terms since the races, he had not come up to tennis. But all his ill-feeling towards her died away when he saw her in trouble, and he would have given a good deal to get her out of

it if he had known how. The heat grew more and more oppressive. Mr Waughope, looking up, saw the sky overcasting and a big storm literally rushing up towards him with a noise like a strong wind. He saw that he would have no time to get to his own bungalow before it burst, and it was not safe to stand under a cocoa-nut tree, so he ran to the manager's bungalow, and not liking to intrude while the family were at variance, he stood under it at a safe distance from the monkeys.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MOLL LEARNS WISDOM.

MOLL threw herself on her bed, which, it seemed to her, was a furnace, and worse when the mosquito curtains were down, so she got up and leant out of the window; but it seemed hotter still there, the fact being that Moll herself was hot; and finally, driven probably before the storm, came a flight of flying ants, whose arrival Moll at first viewed with idle curiosity as they alighted, and dropping their white wings they proceeded to crawl about.

‘That’s the most extraordinary thing I have seen in this odd country, insects that fly about and then drop off their wings and turn into common ants that crawl along the ground. I wonder if you can fix them on again?’ she demanded of an ant, whom she tried to make fly again; but these scientific observations came to an abrupt end as Moll suddenly grasped the fact that the room was full of these unpleasant visitors. There was nothing for it but a hasty retreat to the bed and the shelter of the mosquito curtains, and Moll, not for the first time, had a feeling that she would rather be at her school in England than out here, where she had not seen a single white girl during the three months that she had been out; and then

in spite of, or rather in consequence of, the heavy, drowsy atmosphere, she fell into a deep sleep, while the storm grew worse and worse.

Mrs Meredyth always got a bad headache in a thunderstorm, and lay down in the veranda, with eau-de-Cologne on her head, upon which the thunderclaps seemed to be beating.

Mr Meredyth, who was very gentle in illness, came to her and fanned her, and said something to her, which, however, she could not hear, so she just shook her head. As a matter of fact, he had asked her if Moll were still in her room, and if so had he not better fetch her out, and he understood her to say no; so poor Moll was left to her flying ants and her hot room, where she slept through the worst storm that had been known at Bukit Ayer for many a year.

Mr Waughope, standing under the bungalow, started involuntarily at the deafening claps of thunder, and he thought once or twice that the house must have been struck by the lightning that flashed and nearly blinded him. At last one clap of thunder, which made a singing in his ears, was accompanied by such a vivid flash of lightning that he ran back under the *atap*-covered passage that connected the bungalow with the kitchen and servants' quarters, and there saw what he had feared—that the *atap* roof had caught fire, and at the same moment he heard a crash and a shout of horror from

Mr Meredyth, who was standing just above him, and now ran forward into the bungalow.

Mr Waughope dashed up the back steps after him just in time to see the planter bending over Mrs Meredyth and lifting off a plank which had fallen on her from the ceiling.

He saw that more was going to fall, and as there was no possibility of making any one hear in this storm, he caught the planter's arm and pointed to the falling rafters.

Mr Meredyth nodded, and, gently lifting his wife in his arms, carried her down the steps and under the bungalow, where Mr Waughope followed him with a mattress and pillow, which he put down; and, seeing that he could do nothing further to help her for the moment, shouted to Mr Meredyth to know where Moll was.

But Mr Meredyth did not understand, and was too concerned about his unconscious wife to remember even his beloved daughter, so Mr Waughope dashed up the steps again and banged at Moll's bedroom door, which, it will be remembered, led on to the veranda. It was useless to try and make himself heard, and it was not the moment for standing on ceremony, so he burst into her room; and, finding her asleep on her bed, shook her.

Moll woke with a start, and, seeing Mr Waughope trying to drag her from the bed,

began to struggle, telling him to go away, as she was not afraid of the storm, which, she guessed, was the cause of his intrusion. The rafters in Moll's room were quite safe so far, but he knew that an *atap* roof, being dried leaves, burns rapidly, and expected any moment to see them ablaze; so, taking her by main force by the wrists, he dragged her out of her room and through the veranda, down the steps to where her mother and father were, with the Chinese servants in the background huddled in a corner in desperate fear of the storm, which they feared had killed their mistress.

As for Moll, her indignation with Mr Waughope turned into distress at sight of her mother lying there, looking so white and still that at first she thought she was dead, and threw herself down beside her in a paroxysm of grief.

Mr Meredyth guessed what was Moll's fear, and laying her hand on her mother's wrist made her understand that she was only stunned, and at that moment Mrs Meredyth opened her eyes, though only for a moment.

The rain was now abated, but it seemed as if every rubber-tree on the estate would be blown down; and, communication being hopeless by speech, Mr Waughope went to the telephone, only to find that useless, except to give electric shocks; so he went off to the garage, and set off for the doctor.

Mr Meredyth saw the car flash past, and made a movement as if to stop it, which was quite impossible. The manager looked anxiously after the young man, who was, as he guessed, going to fetch the doctor. It was only a distance of ten miles, which would have been nothing on a fine day; but with trees crashing down and strewing the ground in all directions it was a very different matter, and Mr Meredyth could only console himself with the thought that Mr Waughope was a very cautious and skilful driver, and would keep a sharp lookout for fallen trees across the road. Still, even then there was the danger of his being struck by lightning, for the road was cut through jungle which grew so luxuriously that it met overhead and made some parts of the highway quite dark, especially on a stormy day like this. Mr Meredyth hoped the young man had taken matches, and seen that the lamps of the car were in order; then he turned to his wife, and as she was still unconscious he felt thankful that there was a chance of the doctor coming.

In about half-an-hour the storm decreased in violence, and Moll, who was still kneeling beside her mother, said, 'Father, oughtn't we to telephone for the doctor?'

'I believe Mr Waughope has gone to fetch him,' replied her father.

‘Why didn’t he telephone? It would have been quicker!’ exclaimed Moll.

‘I expect the wires are broken, and that he found he could not; he is sure to have tried. Anyway, he has gone in the car, and if he keeps up the speed he started at he ought to be here in a few minutes,’ said the planter.

Moll was silent, and she then said, ‘Isn’t it rather dangerous in such a dreadful storm to go through the jungle?’

‘Yes, if he had asked my leave I should not have dared to let him go; but he went without asking me. In fact, I only guess he has gone, because I saw him pass, and it would be just like him,’ replied Mr Meredyth.

‘Some people are born thoughtful,’ said Moll in a musing tone, as she looked down sadly upon her mother, wishing with all her heart that she had been more thoughtful, and praying that her mother might be spared that she might show how thoughtful she could be.

They did not speak again until some ten minutes later they heard the sound of the car, and they presently saw their own car driving up the cocoa-nut palm avenue with the doctor sitting beside Mr Waughope.

Dr Hewlett sprang out of the car, and came to Mrs Meredyth without a word. After a few moments, he said, ‘I believe your bungalow has been struck, Meredyth. Is it inhabitable?’

‘I have no idea; the veranda has suffered, for it was there that she was lying when a rafter from the ceiling fell on her,’ replied the planter. He did not ask what the doctor thought about his wife, for he had absolute faith in his old friend, and knew that when he could give him any news he would do so; but a terrible fear clutched him at this ominous silence.

Mr Waughope, who had taken the car to the garage, now returned, and stood at a little distance, not liking to intrude, but just showing that he was there in case he could be of any use.

Mr Meredyth turned to him. ‘Is Mrs Meredyth’s room safe to take her to?’ he inquired.

The assistant turned and went to examine it, and Moll went with him, and they found that the ceiling was not touched; so they brought the still unconscious lady, gently and carefully, up on the mattress, and laid her on her bed.

Moll and Mr Waughope waited for the doctor’s verdict in the veranda, which was a scene of devastation—tables overturned, ornaments broken and strewing the floor, and a great lake in the middle, where the rain had streamed in through the hole in the ceiling.

‘It is a blessing it did not come through on to us below,’ said Moll, breaking the silence.

'Yes, there are only these planks between; it did drip through, for there is another small lake under this, but it is in another part. However, there is this to be said about these bungalows, that though they are easily destroyed they are just as easily mended; a couple of coolies will make this watertight in a few hours,' replied Mr Waughope.

Just then the doctor came out, and he paused for a moment on his way to the telephone to say, 'Your mother is seriously injured, but I hope that with care she will recover. I am going to 'phone for a nurse.'

'The 'phone is broken, or rather the wires must be, as I could not get on to you,' said Mr Waughope.

The doctor uttered an exclamation of impatience. 'Of course, you said so. I wonder where we can get a connection?' he observed.

'I could try Klang,' suggested Mr Waughope.

'I think that you had better. It is awkward Ken being away, but you can arrange this all right.' He proceeded to give him directions; and, having made clear to him exactly what he wanted, he returned to the invalid.

'Doctor,' Moll called after him, as he was disappearing, 'mayn't I come? Can't I do anything?'

Dr Hewlett turned back and smiled to her. 'Not yet, Moll, but I promise to let you come

to your mother as soon as you can do any good ; in the meantime you will have to be housekeeper and 'look after your father's comfort,' he explained, and with this Moll had to be content.

Mr Waughope meanwhile had gone off, and was back again in a very short time with Mr Fish and a gang of coolies, whom he left to repair the *atap* roof, which, thanks to the rain, had not all burnt, and before night came on the bungalow was watertight again ; new planks, which were fortunately at hand, having replaced the old ones, and the *ataps* having been renewed.

Moll, by the aid of a Malay dictionary, told the Chinese 'boys' to *chuchee* (clean up) ; and though the breakages were beyond repair, and the cushions and matting soaking wet, the veranda was in order enough to sit in by the evening.

Mr Fish stopped there with Moll to wait for news and for Mr Waughope's return, which, however, was not that day.

'He has had to go to Singapore for the nurse, I suppose ; those wires have gone wrong again. That's one of the drawbacks of new countries, things never run as smoothly as at home,' observed the doctor when he came out ; and, hearing of Mr Waughope's non-arrival, he announced his intention of staying that night.

Kenneth, who of course knew nothing of all

these troubles, had been caught by this same thunderstorm, and stayed the night with friends; and as Mr Waughope did not return either, Mr Fish begged to be allowed to sleep on a long cane chair in the veranda, so as to be handy in case he was wanted, and Mr Meredyth accepted his offer.

‘We colonists learn to be nurses and all sorts of things, Moll,’ he explained to his daughter, who was hurt at not being allowed to go into the sick-room.

‘If I were as thoughtful as Mr Waughope they would let me nurse mother,’ she observed to the sympathetic Mr Fish.

‘You are not as old as he is by six and a half years; you’ll be thoughtful enough by-and-by,’ he replied to console her.

‘I don’t believe Mr Waughope was ever like me; lots of girls of fourteen are quite grown-up,’ said Moll, who certainly was a baby in some ways.

Mr Fish could not contradict this, but he talked quietly to her about all sorts of things; and though he had been up since five, never showed any signs of fatigue or suggested bed. At eleven o’clock Mr Meredyth came out of the sick-room and told Moll the doctor was less anxious, and that she was to go to bed, which she did without a word, as her first effort at being thoughtful.

CHAPTER XXIX.

DOMESTIC DIFFICULTIES.

A TRYING day followed the storm. The nurse arrived with Mr Waughope by the first train, and in the evening Mr Meredyth came out of the sick-room, where a punkah had been put up, and said in joyful tones, 'We shall pull her through now, thank heaven, and then off you both go to England. In the meantime your mother wishes you to housekeep for her, Moll.'

Moll's face grew crimson with pride at this token of her mother's faith in her; but she did not choose to show her real feelings, so she only said with pretended dignity, 'Then I shall stop your curries and all those awful dishes that you are so fond of, and have plain English food.'

Mr Meredyth only laughed as he went off to the office to look through the reports of the last two days; but Mr Fish, who, as well as Mr Waughope, had come up for news, observed, 'Our home is open to you, Ken, when you are at the last state of emaciation.'

'I'm not going to wait for that; I am coming to your place to live for a week or two; they want my room, anyway, for the nurse,' said Kenneth.

‘Never mind, Moll; we’ll come up as soon as the *mem* is better, and have a wholesome *makan* for once,’ said Mr Fish, as the three young men departed for the night.

Moll tiptoed into her mother’s room, and was cheered by hearing Mrs Meredyth speaking to her rationally, although in a faint voice, as she told her to try and keep the house comfortable for father.

Mr Meredyth came back from the office, much disturbed at finding that something had gone wrong on the estate, and this time he had not his wife to turn to for her ready sympathy. So when Moll came to him for help in her housekeeping next morning he only waved her away hastily, saying, ‘Do as you like, child; anything will do for me; give out the stores to cookie, and order what you please.’

‘But, father, I may make mistakes,’ protested Moll.

‘Never mind; we’ll put up with the mistakes, and your mother can only take soda and milk, so you need not worry about her;’ and the planter went off to his office, whence he did not return till tiffin-time to find a very heated and harassed-looking daughter and an indifferent meal. However, he gulped it down, and beyond some sharp rebukes to the Chinese cookie he made no complaint.

At tea-time Mr Waughope said to Mr Fish,

‘I say, Fish, what do you say to asking the manager and Moll down to dinner to-night?’

‘They won’t come while the *mem* is ill,’ objected Mr Fish.

‘I fancy they will; anyway, let’s have *makan* for them. I’m going up to ask how they all are, and have a cup of tea with Moll.’

‘Oh you are friends again? All right, go on,’ agreed Mr Fish.

‘I am glad you’ve come, Mr Waughope; I can’t find the servants anywhere; I suppose they have gone for a walk,’ said Moll at sight of him.

‘What! all three of them?’ exclaimed Mr Waughope in astonishment.

‘Yes, I went across to the kitchen to see why they did not answer me when I called them (there are no bells in this country, as far as I can see), and I found it empty, and a few sticks smouldering on that stone which I suppose is a Malay fireplace,’ explained Moll.

Mr Waughope stood on the top of the steps, shading his eyes, and looked all round. ‘There’s no sign of them anywhere, so I suppose if you want tea we had better make it ourselves,’ he observed.

‘I would have made it, but I don’t know how to make that fire burn,’ said Moll.

‘I’ll fix that up for you, if you’ll cut some

bread for toast. To tell you the truth, I'm afraid those beggars have bolted.'

'Run away? Impossible!' cried Moll aghast.

'It's very possible; it's a way they have here if anything does not please them. Perhaps you said something,' he suggested.

'I said a lot; but fancy their going without their wages! What tiresome things native servants—oh well, Chinese, or any coloured servants—are. And oh, Mr Waughope, I do hope they have not. What shall we do for dinner to-night—father had such a bad lunch?'

'You are coming down to us, so that's all right, and we'll send up *makan* for the nurse; so don't worry. The water's boiling; let's make tea,' he returned.

'You are very good, and I am a dreadful nuisance. Even when I try to do my best I make a muddle of it,' said Moll quite humbly.

'Every one makes a muddle of things at first out here, because of not knowing the language or the ways or anything. Let me carry that tray,' and he led the way, Moll following with the toast.

Mr Meredyth, coming in from the estate, saw the procession with surprise. 'Servants bolted? The villains! I have half a mind to prosecute them, but it is too much trouble. Well, they are due three days' wages, that's one comfort. Never mind, Moll; don't look so

worried ; we 'll send down to the coolie lines and get some fellows up for a day or two,' said her father, cheery as ever, now that his wife was better and he had put things right on the estate.

Moll was much ashamed that her first day of housekeeping had ended so disastrously, and two days of Javanese tappers as servants sent Mr Meredyth off to the Kuala registry office to look for servants, three of whom he brought back in the car with him.

To Moll's amazement, they turned out to be the old ones, who descended smiling like old friends. 'Father, what did you have them back for? They don't deserve it!' cried she.

'Oh as far as that goes it's six of one and half-a-dozen of the other; they all run off if they are not satisfied. The fact is, my dear, they did not quite understand you; it appears you told them you were not going to have their messes, and it—er—upset them. You must let them have their way for the present, because—well, really, tappers are best in their own place, and upon my word we have not had anything decent to eat for two days, and not a thing has been done in the bungalow.'

'It's a horrid country this!' declared Moll.

'Well, it's not as comfortable as the old country; but it's got its points, and I couldn't live at home after this free-and-easy life and this glorious climate,' said Mr Fish.

‘Do you really call this a glorious climate?’ demanded Moll.

‘Yes, I do—lovely sunshine, a cool breeze in the middle of the day, and cool nights; everlasting summer, I call it.’

‘I’m tired of summer,’ said Moll, whom the heat was trying very much.

Mr Meredyth looked keenly at his daughter. ‘Yes, six months of this country has just been about enough for you. After all, it only means my going home a few months earlier,’ said Mr Meredyth.

‘Oh father, are we really going home?’ cried Moll eagerly.

‘As soon as your mother is able to travel,’ replied her father.

‘Are you so anxious to leave Bukit Ayer?’ asked Mr Fish.

‘I am anxious to be back in England, though I like Bukit Ayer for some things.’

‘But you will have no more holidays when we get back to England, remember that. How will you like going back to school?’ asked her father.

‘That’s just the very thing I am looking forward to,’ said Moll. ‘I mean, being with girls again; I am so tired of nothing but men.’

‘Well, good-afternoon, Meredyth.—Good-bye, Moll; I’ll avoid the bungalow during the remainder of your stay,’ said Mr Fish, getting

up to go, with a great show of being much offended at Moll's candid speech.

Moll only laughed merrily as she said, 'I didn't mean to be rude, and please don't go, for you are better than nobody; but I can't take back what I said. If you only knew how I long for a girl to speak to, and before I used to like being with Tommy'—her brother—'better than any of my schoolfellows.'

'I can understand that; I've rather wished I had a girl to talk to myself—sometimes,' retorted Mr Fish.

But if this was meant as a sly hit at Moll, it missed its mark, for she replied, 'Yes, I should think you must get tired of each other sometimes.'

Another fortnight went by, and Mrs Meredith slowly but steadily improved in health, and at length the doctor declared her fit to travel, and passages were taken for them on the identical boat upon which Moll came out.

Mr Waughope and Mr Fish made a joint expedition into Kuala, and came back laden with presents for Moll, and finally the three young assistants went to Singapore to see their manager and his family off for home, amid much waving of handkerchiefs.

'We shall miss her dreadfully,' said Mr Waughope solemnly.

'Yes, but I'm glad she's gone; it's too hot

for the excitements she causes,' said Mr Fish, who, with all his good-nature and liking for Moll, liked best of all an easy-going life.

'I think I shall sleep more peacefully now that I know she is on the briny ocean,' observed Kenneth.

Then Mr Waughope burst forth, stammering in his heat, 'It only just shows how selfish life out here makes one. Fancy being glad that such a splendid girl as that has gone! Why, it did us no end of good having her here.'

The other two looked at him in surprise.

'I say, Moll has begun early to make conquests,' said Mr Fish lightly.

'She's not a bad child, but I did not think you cared much for my madcap cousin,' said Kenneth.

'She may be a madcap, but she has a noble character,' declared Mr Waughope stoutly.

'H'm, you go home in four years. If you are of the same mind I shall expect great news of you!' chaffed Mr Fish.

But Mr Waughope treated his joke with disdain.

Funnily enough, on board ship a conversation of somewhat the same sort was taking place.

'I shall miss those* light-hearted, honest boys,' said the planter.

'Yes, and glad as I am of a holiday, I shall

